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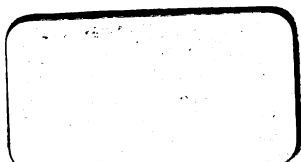
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HILARY ST. IVES.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

MAY.

| | I. | PAGE |
|---------------------------|------|------|
| LOST ON A HEATH | | 3 |
| | II. | |
| MRS. SUTTON | | 31 |
| | III. | |
| MRS. RADCLIFFE | | 54 |
| | IV. | |
| THE INTERVIEW | | 74 |

| | | |
|---|-------|------|
| | V. | PAGE |
| MAY AND HER MOTHER | | 87 |
| | VI. | |
| OSWALD | | 98 |
| | VII. | |
| MR. RADCLIFFE | | 115 |
| | VIII. | |
| SIR CHARLES ILMINSTER AND LADY RICHBOROUGH | | 125 |
| | IX. | |
| WHY MRS. SUTTON WENT TO GUILDFORD, AND WHOM SHE MET THERE | | 139 |
| | X. | |
| COLONEL DELACOMBE | | 152 |
| | XI. | |
| MR. PAGE THORNTON | | 161 |
| | XII. | |
| IN WHAT MANNER MRS. SUTTON OBTAINED POSSESSION OF THE DOCUMENTS. | | 180 |
| | XIII. | |
| MAY'S BIRTHDAY | | 191 |

CONTENTS.

v

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XIV. | |
| HILARY'S STORY | 209 |
| XV. | |
| THE SKETCH | 228 |
| XVI. | |
| BREAKFAST | 241 |
| XVII. | |
| WHAT PASSED IN THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM | 257 |
| XVIII. | |
| A SECOND BREAKFAST | 266 |
| XIX. | |
| HOW THEY MET AFTER LONG YEARS | 276 |

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Gilary St. Ives.

BOOK I.

MAY.

Hilary St. Ives.

BOOK I.

MAY.

I.

LOST ON A HEATH.

ONE evening, at the latter end of April, a few years ago, just as it was becoming dusk, a young man, extremely well favoured and well proportioned, took his way on foot across an extensive heath in one of our southern counties.

Hilary St. Ives—for so was he named—might be about one or two and twenty. Rather dark, perhaps, but strikingly handsome. Features regular and well cut; complexion olive; locks jet black; eyes dark and shaded by long eyelashes

that tempered their fire; beard black and of a silken texture. Altogether, as fine a young man as you could desire to see. A Tweed walking suit and round felt hat constituted his costume. Across his broad shoulders were strapped a knapsack and a waterproof coat, and he carried a stout stick in his hand.

Our young traveller was bound for the village of Wootton, which was situated at the further side of the heath, where he had learnt there was a good inn, at which he proposed to rest for the night. He had walked far that day, and having dined early and somewhat sparingly, was quite ready for supper. In fact, the keen air and exercise made him feel ravenously hungry.

As far as he could judge—for he was a stranger to the country—three miles still lay between him and the desired haven. Nothing to so stout a pedestrian as he. But if the distance could be

shortened so much the better. He would be sooner at the inn and supper would be sooner set before him.

After looking in the direction where he supposed Wootton lay, and studying, as far as he was able, the intervening ground, he came to the conclusion that a considerable angle might be cut off by quitting the high road, and crossing the heath as a crow would wing its flight over it. All very well in the day-time, but the shades of night were gathering rapidly, and the gloom was increased by a mist that arose from an adjacent marsh.

Hilary, however, had no misgivings — no idea of the risk he might run. He was not aware that between him and Wootton lay a deep and dangerous morass, which could only be safely traversed by one familiar with the locality.

Wootton Heath, though partially reclaimed, still comprehended many miles of wholly uncultivated

land. Being undrained, some portions of the waste were marshy, and about half a mile to the left of the road, along which our young traveller was wending his way, lay the extensive morass to which we have just adverted.

On the other side the heath was less swampy, and being covered by a short thymy turf, was well adapted to sheep pasture. When enlivened by sunshine, the wide expanse, purpled by heather, embellished by fern and clusters of tall gorse, with here and there a grey old thorn or a holly, presented a charming picture. The limits of the heath were marked on the right by a broad belt of firs overtopped by the white spire of a newly built church. On the left the boundary was undefined, the village of Wootton being invisible. Three or four little knolls or hillocks rising in the midst of the waste were crowned with clumps of pines, and contributed to the beauty of the landscape.

Before quitting the high road Hilary looked around in quest of some one to direct him to Wootton. Not a human being was in sight. Not a sound was heard, except the bleating of sheep and the distant barking of a watch-dog. The heath was perfectly solitary. However, our young traveller did not hesitate; but striking off on the left, where, as we have explained, the danger lay, he speeded over the elastic turf.

In this manner he had soon accomplished nearly half a mile, without encountering any obstacle, except such as was presented by clumps of gorse, intermingled with briars, and was congratulating himself on his cleverness, when the swampy nature of the ground brought him to a sudden standstill.

Not a minute too soon. Had he taken many steps farther, he would have been engulfed in the treacherous morass. He understood his danger, perceiving that the quagmire must be im-

passable, and not liking to skirt it, he turned back, as much provoked with himself as he had previously been well satisfied.

He endeavoured to regain the high road, which he had so imprudently quitted, but bewildered by the gloom—for it was now quite dark—he failed in discovering it, and after wandering about for nearly half an hour, again found himself on the verge of the morass.

This was indeed vexatious. But confident that by pursuing a straight course he must eventually reach the road, he turned back at once. Unluckily, his course was *not* straight. Without being aware of it, he deviated from the direct line, and to his infinite surprise and mortification, found himself, for the third time, on the borders of the morass.

He was now quite confounded, and began to think he must be condemned to move in a magic circle.

Another half hour found him only more hope-

lessly involved. By no efforts could he discover the road, though he appeared to have no difficulty in finding the morass. Uneasy thoughts beset him. He shuddered at the idea of passing the night on the dark and dreary heath. But he soon took heart. Though constantly baffled, he would not succumb, until forced to do so by sheer exhaustion.

Vainly did he attempt to extricate himself from the magic circle. As surely as he went on, so surely did he come back to the inevitable point. At last, he was brought to a halt. Carefully as he proceeded, he contrived to roll down a hollow, and when he recovered from the fall he sat down on the brink of the pit to reflect; the bitterness of his reflections being aggravated by the tantalising picture summoned up by his fancy of the snug parlour at the inn, with the hot supper in preparation.

Heavens! how hungry he felt. Springing to

his feet he set off again, but presently got entangled in a thick cluster of gorse.

But help was now at hand. While he was struggling out of the gorse, voices reached his ears, and he instantly hastened in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, shouting lustily as he went.

Instead of responding to his outcries, the interlocutors became suddenly mute, and the darkness did not permit him to distinguish them.

After a moment's pause, he called out again. This time, a gruff voice demanded who he was, and what he wanted? Hilary replied that he was a traveller, who had lost his way on the heath, and pressing on as he spoke, soon descried two sturdy-looking vagabonds, who were standing in a more open spot, tranquilly awaiting his approach. The fellows were roughly clad, and had the appearance of gipsies, and their looks and deport-

ment inspired Hilary with distrust. On their part, the gipsies eyed him narrowly.

As he came up, the surly fellow who had first addressed him, asked if he wanted to be smothered in the bog, that he ventured near it on so dark a night.

"I have no such desire," replied Hilary. "Like a fool I must needs quit the high road, and I have paid the penalty for my folly by being kept wandering about on the brink of the marsh for two hours at least."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the gipsy. "Pleasant pastime on a dark night. You may thank your stars it's no worse. It's easier to get into a bog than to get out of it, as many a poor devil has found to his cost."

"I want to go to Wootton!" cried Hilary, who did not like this jesting; "will you show me the way?"

"The nearest way lies straight on," said the man.

"Why that will take me to the marsh!" cried Hilary.

"To be sure it will!" exclaimed the other gipsy, with a coarse laugh. "Seth Cooper is gammoning you. You must go round about, if you want to get safely to Wootton."

"Why need you trouble yourself about him, Reuben!" cried Seth Cooper. "What is it to you if he should be drowned?"

"Not much, certainly. Still——"

"Will half a crown tempt you to show me the road?" interrupted Hilary.

"I should say not," returned Seth Cooper. "Do you rate your life at only half a crown's valley?"

"Make it half a crown a-piece," quoth Reuben, who seemed of milder mood than his companion, "and we'll consider about it."

"Well," cried the young man, "put me in the right way to Wootton, and you shall have what you ask."

"Money down, or we don't budge," cried Seth Cooper.

"No," rejoined Hilary, in a determined tone. "Bring me to the high road, and I'll pay you. But not a stiver till then."

Seth made some growling observations, but his companion signified his assent to the young man's proposal, and the pair at once moved off, bearing towards the right. Hilary, who had now quite recovered his energies, followed them.

After trudging along in silence for a few minutes, Reuben hung back, and in a more civil tone than he had previously adopted, inquired of Hilary if he had travelled far that day?

"Farther than you would like to travel on foot, I reckon," replied the young man.

"Then you must have had a long tramp," re-

turned Reuben, laughing. "Many's the time I've done my forty miles, and been none the worse for it."

"But you warn't incommoded with a heavy knapsack," remarked Seth Cooper, turning round. "Why don't you offer to carry it for the gem-man?"

"Come, no nonsense!" cried Hilary, sternly. "Leave my knapsack alone. You'd best."

"Why, what's the matter?" rejoined Seth. "Do you think we want to rob you—eh?"

"You would find it no easy job if you made the attempt. Move on, I say, and keep well in front."

But instead of complying, both men stopped.

"It seems you don't like our company, master," remarked Reuben. "That being the case, you'd better go on alone."

"You made a bargain with me, and I expect

you to fulfil your part of it, as I mean to fulfil mine," said Hilary, in a bold, authoritative tone. "I insist upon your conducting me to the high road."

"First tell us what you've got in that ere knapsack," remarked Seth. "We should like to know."

"Would you? Then I don't intend to gratify your curiosity. I would fain believe you to be honest men."

"Why, what else do you take us for?" cried Seth, fiercely. "Out with it. Let's know your mind."

His manner clearly intimated violence, but his comrade dragged him off, and they went on as before. The high road was not far distant, and on reaching it, they both faced about.

"That's the way to Wootton," said Reuben. "We'll now wish you good night."

"Not afore he has settled with us," cried Seth.

While Hilary was searching for the money, Seth rushed suddenly upon him, and seizing him by the throat, with a choking gripe, bore him to the ground. Hilary struggled desperately, and would have freed himself, if Reuben had not come to his comrade's assistance.

Seth then possessed himself of the stick, and beat the luckless young man with it about the head till he rendered him insensible.

The two ruffians next proceeded to despoil their victim, took off his knapsack, and were proceeding to empty his pockets and pluck the guard-chain from his neck, when the noise of wheels alarmed them.

A dog-cart was coming on at a quick pace, and its lamp, together with the light of the cigars they were smoking, showed there were two persons in the vehicle. These persons appeared to be

known to Reuben, for he remarked to his comrade, who was still kneeling upon his victim's chest,

"It's old Radcliffe, of Hazlemere, and his nevey, young Oswald Woodcot. We must be off. But first let us drag the poor devil out of the road, or he'll be run over."

"Never mind if he is," rejoined Seth Cooper. "If I'd had my own way, we should have done the job where we met him, and then we could have flung the body into the bog, and no more would have been heard of him."

Here the rapid advance of the dog-cart forced him to abandon part of his booty, and he disappeared with his comrade amid the furze-bushes.

The disaster apprehended by Reuben seemed imminent. Luckily, however, Mr. Radcliffe descried the body of the unfortunate young man lying in the middle of the road and pulled up just in time.

"Who-oh, Spanker!" he cried. "What's that, a sack, or a man? Get down, Oswald, and see what it is."

His nephew flung away his cigar, descended at once, and immediately afterwards called out, in accents of horror,

"It's a man—murdered, I fear."

"Murdered! bless me! I hope not," cried Mr. Radcliffe, who was likewise greatly horrified. "Take the lamp, Oswald, and make a careful examination. I'd get down myself, but, as you know, Spanker won't stand."

And, as if to confirm the statement, the mettlesome horse snorted, and exhibited signs of impatience.

"He's a young man, uncle—a very fine young man," exclaimed Oswald, throwing the light of the lamp upon Hilary's pallid and blood-stained visage. "Roughly handled, but not dead. He

breathes, and I think may recover. It would seem that he has only just been attacked, and probably we have disturbed his assailants."

"Why do you imagine the poor fellow has been attacked by more than one person, Oswald?"

"For this reason, uncle. Such a powerfully built young fellow, as he appears to be, would have beaten any ordinary ruffian, unless he had been taken unawares."

"Have you any idea who he is?"

"Not the least. Never saw him before. He looks like a gentleman. There's a signet ring on his finger. I wonder the villains didn't take it. Perhaps they hadn't time, for they've left his watch and guard-chain. What's to be done, uncle? We can't leave him here."

"Of course not," rejoined Mr. Radcliffe. "It's a mercy I didn't run over him. I should never have forgiven myself if I had."

“Well, uncle, the best plan will be for you to drive as fast as you can to Malham’s, the surgeon’s at Wootton, and procure assistance. I’ll stay with the poor fellow.”

“No, no; that won’t do. The villains may be lurking about. If we could only manage to get him into the dog-cart, we might take him to the surgery. Can he move at all?”

“I’ll see.”

As Oswald, who was a stalwart young fellow himself, essayed to lift the injured man, the latter exhibited some slight consciousness, but he was so stunned and confused that considerable difficulty was experienced in getting him into the dog-cart. This being accomplished at last, he was sustained by Oswald, while Mr. Radcliffe drove on at a quick pace towards Wootton.

As they speeded over the heath, the rapidity of the motion in some degree revived Hilary, and

he endeavoured to explain what had befallen him. Mr. Radcliffe and his nephew, however, deemed it prudent not to put too many questions to him.

On reaching Wootton, Mr. Radcliffe drove at once to the surgery. Luckily, Mr. Malham was within, and having carefully washed the coagulated blood from the wounded man's dark locks and sponged his brow, he pronounced that he was not seriously injured. There was no fracture of the skull. A stimulant administered to the sufferer tended greatly to restore him.

Meantime, Oswald, leaving the injured man to the care of the surgeon, set off in quest of the police, and he now returned with an officer, to whom Hilary detailed all particulars of the murderous attack made upon him, describing his assailants as well as he could, and mentioning the names by which they had addressed each other.

Wormald, the officer, who seemed an active and intelligent man, listened attentively to what was told him, and remarked that he had no doubt the men were gipsies—Cooper being a common name among the vagabonds. Wootton Heath, he said, was infested by the vagabonds. Two men, answering to the description given of the robbers, had been seen about the village lately. They were tinkers. Wormald felt certain he should be able to effect their capture before morning.

“I hope I shall recover my knapsack,” said Hilary. “It contains nothing of any value, except some papers, which are of great importance to myself. I would rather lose a good sum of money than those documents.”

On hearing this, the officer looked rather grave, and so did Mr. Radcliffe.

“Excuse me, sir,” remarked Wormald, “for

saying that you ought not to have placed important documents in a knapsack."

"Certainly not," observed Mr. Radcliffe, shaking his head.

"Yes, I feel I did wrong," said Hilary.

"Well, I don't think you will lose them, as they can't be of any value to these rascals," said the officer.

"You mustn't let the scent get cold, Wormald," cried Oswald. "The sooner you give chase the better."

"I can guess pretty well where I'm likely to meet with the rogues, sir," said the officer, confidently. "I and my mate, Barker, will mount and be on their track in less than ten minutes. But you haven't yet told me your name, sir."

"Hilary St. Ives—that's my name," replied the young man.

"From Cornwall?" inquired Oswald.

"No," replied the other; but he gave no further information. "You'll find me at the inn," he added to the officer.

"No, you won't, Wormald," cried Mr. Radcliffe. "You'll find Mr. St. Ives at Hazlemere. I mean to take him home with me."

"All right, sir," replied the officer. And with a salute he departed.

"You won't be in bad quarters at Hazlemere, I can promise you, Mr. St. Ives," observed Oswald. "My uncle, though I say it to his face, is the jolliest old gentleman in the county."

"At all events, you'll be more comfortable with me than you would be at the George, though you wouldn't be badly off there," said Mr. Radcliffe. "My housekeeper, Mrs. Sutton, will take good care of you—eh, Malham?"

"Mr. St. Ives couldn't be in better hands than Mrs. Sutton's," returned the surgeon. "And he *will* require a nurse, for he mustn't expect to

escape without a little fever. It wouldn't surprise me if he were laid up for two or three days."

"You hear that, Mr. Radcliffe," said Hilary.
"Doesn't that alarm you?"

"Not in the least. Mrs. Sutton is an excellent nurse, as Mr. Malham can testify."

"That I can, sir. Though Mr. St. Ives has had the ill luck to be knocked down, he has contrived to fall on his legs."

"Gad, Malham, it's uncommonly lucky we happened to be passing at the time. My nephew and I have been to Binfield—intending merely to make a call—but Tom Irby persuaded us to stay dinner, and we were getting back as fast as Spanker could take us—and you know how well he goes—when we came upon this poor young fellow lying in the middle of the road. Another minute, and it would have been all over with him—but we won't think of that. Here he is."

"I feel I am indebted to you, sir, and to your

nephew for the preservation of my life," said Hilary, earnestly. "I am truly sensible of your kindness. But I really am not in a condition to avail myself of your hospitality. Having lost my knapsack, I have not even a change of linen."

"Poh! Oswald will supply all your wants in that respect."

"That I will, with the greatest pleasure," said the young man. "You shall have the pick of my wardrobe, Mr. St. Ives, and as we're about the same size, my things will fit you."

"All's settled," cried his uncle. "Help our young friend into the dog-cart."

Hilary made some further remonstrances, but the worthy old gentleman overruled them, and glancing at his nephew, the latter assisted Hilary to arise, and the two young men went out of the surgery together.

Mr. Radcliffe tarried to have a parting word with the surgeon.

"Anything to say to me, Malham?" he asked.

"Not much, sir," replied the surgeon. "You may make up your mind to have this young man at Hazlemere for three or four days, or a week. He's certain to have fever, and it won't be long in coming on. No need for alarm, though. No mischief has been done. He has been knocked about the head pretty severely, but his skull is luckily as thick as an Irishman's, and not easily cracked. I needn't prescribe for him. You have only to explain the case to Mrs. Sutton. She has a medicine chest, and will know what to give him."

"Ay, Mrs. Sutton beats you all hollow, Malham," cried Mr. Radcliffe, with a laugh. "She likes to act as nurse."

"Mrs. Sutton is a very clever woman, and a very good woman, and if I got hurt, I should like her to nurse me—that's all I can say."

"She's invaluable to us, Malham," cried the old

gentleman, tears of gratitude springing to his eyes.

"She has lived with us for nineteen years—ever since my darling May was born—and we have never had a fault to find with her. As you know, my dear wife has always been an invalid. A nurse is a necessity to her, and she has found the best of nurses in Mrs. Sutton. Without her unremitting care and attention—and skill, Malham, skill—Mrs. Radcliffe wouldn't be alive now."

It seemed a pleasure to the old gentleman to sing his housekeeper's praises. A pleasure, also, to the surgeon to listen to them.

"You may with truth assert, sir," he rejoined, "that, but for Mrs. Sutton's care, your wife would not be alive now."

Emotion kept Mr. Radcliffe silent. He brushed his eyes, and said, "You'll come over to see this young fellow in the morning, Malham?"

"I'll come to see how he gets on, since you

desire it, sir; but I'm sure Mrs. Sutton will treat him properly."

"At all events, she'll be very glad to consult with you. You're a great favourite of hers, Malham."

The surgeon smiled and bowed.

"I wonder who the deuce this young St. Ives can be? and where he comes from? I don't know whether you remarked it, but he seemed rather shy in giving any information about himself to my nephew. I'm certain he's a gentleman, or I wouldn't take him home with me."

"A gentleman, no doubt, sir. Don't excite him by any questions to-night. He's not exactly himself. We shall learn all about him, by and by. Get him to bed as soon as you can."

Nothing more passed. Mr. Radcliffe bade the surgeon good night, and shook hands with him. On going forth, he found that his nephew and

Hilary were already seated in the dog-cart. Mr. Malham's groom was standing at Spanker's head. Taking the reins from the man, Mr. Radcliffe got into the vehicle more actively than might have been expected from so stout a personage, and drove off.

Hazlemere was about a mile and a half distant from Wootton, and while they are on the way thither, we shall take the opportunity of offering a brief description of the place, and saying a few words about its occupants.

II.

MRS. SUTTON.

HAZLEMERE HOUSE was a large, commodious, red-brick mansion, built, towards the close of the last century, by the present owner's grandsire—a merchant of the City of London. The site had been well chosen, in the midst of a lovely country. Though the house was comparatively modern, not being more than seventy years old, there was fine timber around it; the gardens were extensive, and the grounds well laid out. At no great distance, there was a miniature lake,

from which the place derived its name. "To sum up," as the worthy old cit, who reared it, used to say, it was a delightful country house.

Like his sire and grandsire, our friend, Mr. Theobald Radcliffe, had been in business in the City, but had retired several years ago, and now lived entirely at Hazlemere. His wife, as we have seen, was a great invalid, and never left home. She would not stir without Mrs. Sutton, and Mrs. Sutton did not like to leave Hazlemere. Mr. Radcliffe had no son ; but he had something far better—a most charming daughter.

Her father was very proud of her, and he might well be so. May Radcliffe had a thousand attractive qualities which it would take pages to enumerate. She must have had some faults, we suppose, but her father could never discern them. He thought her perfection. She was exceedingly amiable, and her nature was so joyous that she

seemed to diffuse happiness wherever she went. Her light laughter was the pleasantest music in her father's ears, though he liked also to listen to her sweet voice as she touched the piano. May was a favourite with everybody in the house, except Mrs. Sutton. The exception may appear incomprehensible, seeing that Mrs. Sutton had nursed her during infancy, and watched over her ever since, and might naturally be supposed to have almost a mother's love for her. But so it was. Mrs. Sutton had once doated upon her; but her feelings of late had undergone a change. She did not, however, allow this change to appear, but treated May with every semblance of affection, and seemed anxious as ever to gratify her slightest wish.

But May was not to be deceived. She detected the change. What had she done to forfeit her dear old nurse's love? She could not tell. But

the idea made her unhappy, and being wholly incapable of concealment, she confessed her uneasiness to the author of it, promising, if she had offended in any way, to make instant reparation. "Tell me what it is, dear Mrs. Sutton," she cried. "You know how dearly I love you."

Mrs. Sutton looked surprised and hurt, and reproached her gently, telling her she was a silly child to entertain any such nonsensical notion. She then kissed her affectionately, and assured her, with a look that carried conviction with it, that she loved her better than any one in the world, except her dear mistress. Secretly, perhaps, Mrs. Sutton did not love either of them overmuch. But she played her part so well, that she effectually dissipated all May's misgivings.

Mrs. Radcliffe was the youngest daughter of Mr. Page Thornton, a flourishing solicitor of Chester. Both the Miss Thorntons were considered belles in their day, and had been much

admired by the youth of Chester, as well as by the officers quartered in the ancient city of Hugh Lupus. Both married well, though neither was united to the man she herself would have chosen. Isabella, the eldest, became the second wife of Dr. Woodcot, an eminent physician in Manchester. But of her anon. Esther Thornton, who had been a great flirt, and had had we know not how many entanglements, managed to captivate Mr. Radcliffe, whom she met at a ball at Liverpool. Mr. Radcliffe was double Esther's age; but that did not matter; he was a wealthy merchant, and when he followed her to Chester, and proposed, Mr. Thornton, who was tired out by so many flirtations that came to nothing, insisted upon her accepting him. She did so, and gave up Captain Delacombe, who became distracted. Like a sensible fellow as he was, Mr. Radcliffe did not trouble himself with his wife's

former flirtations, but esteemed himself eminently fortunate in possessing such a charming creature.

Esther had been always extremely delicate, and after the birth of May she became a confirmed invalid. A young widow, unembarrassed by a family, was recommended to her as a nurse. This was Mrs. Sutton, who had never since quitted the family, and had really become a very important member of it. It is questionable whether she had most influence with Mrs. Radcliffe or her husband. Both were governed by her without being aware of it. Mrs. Sutton at the time of her entrance into the family, and assumption of the duties of nurse and house-keeper, for she filled both offices, was about five-and-twenty—perhaps not quite so much—but she called herself five-and-twenty. She never gave any particulars of her previous history, nor were they asked for, out of consideration for her feel-

ings, it being understood that her marriage had been unhappy. Her countenance long wore a shade of melancholy, but this wore off in time. She was perfectly well educated, and had the manners of a gentlewoman; but though evidently superior to her situation, she fulfilled all its duties, and became, as her mistress declared, a model nurse and a model housekeeper. Plain of feature, she was not without personal attraction, for her figure was good, her hair dark and fine, her complexion very fair, and her teeth beautifully white and even. Her hands and feet were small and well formed. Such charms as she possessed she contrived to preserve in a very wonderful manner, and indeed she seemed rather to improve than deteriorate by age. She dressed very plainly and consistently, but was so neat that what she wore always became her. Mrs. Radcliffe used often to say that she could never

get a dress to fit her in the same way that Mrs. Sutton's dresses did. Her manner was extremely quiet and prepossessing. At first Mrs. Sutton had had the care of May, but Mrs. Radcliffe's delicate state of health demanded her exclusive care, and another nurse was engaged. Gradually she rose to an important position in the house, but as she never made her power unpleasantly manifest, she was liked by the whole household, of whom she was in effect mistress, for Mrs. Radcliffe was too feeble to attempt the management, and Mr. Radcliffe, who was quite aware of his wife's incompetency, was well pleased that she should be thus efficiently represented. Mrs. Radcliffe entrusted her keys and her purse to her housekeeper, kept nothing from her in fact, and was constantly making her handsome presents. Mrs. Sutton was her confidante and counsellor, and as she possessed a far stronger

mind than her mistress, her ascendancy became complete. But as May grew up Mrs. Sutton began to fear she might be supplanted. Hence her jealousy of the amiable and unoffending girl, to whom she had previously been so fondly attached. She could brook no interference. Never would she relinquish the keys—never submit to have her authority restricted or controlled. The sole plan of removing her young and dangerous rival was to get her married, and she had no doubt that this could be speedily accomplished. Already May had plenty of suitors, but she seemed to care for none of them. Mrs. Sutton, however, relied upon Cousin Oswald.

And now a few words as to this young gentleman. Oswald Woodcot was the only son of Mrs. Radcliffe's sister Isabella, who had now been some ten years a widow. Mrs. Woodcot was not very well off, her late husband having left the bulk of

his property to his children by his first wife. Her son, therefore, was indebted for the excellent education he had received to his grandfather, Mr. Thornton, of Chester, who was still alive, and still in business, though an old man. Oswald was destined for the bar, and had every prospect of success, owing to his grandfather's interest and connexions; but he had a distaste to the legal profession, though he didn't care to avow it to Mr. Thornton. The old solicitor, who was very rich, and talked of making him his heir, might change his mind, if he displeased him. Mrs. Woodcot would have liked to see her son in the army, but of course this was out of the question, unless Mr. Thornton's consent could be obtained, and it being quite certain he would strongly oppose the plan, it was never mentioned to him, and the idea was abandoned. It was pretty clear, however, that Oswald would never make a figure at the bar, and

this his shrewd old grandfather had already begun to suspect. Mrs. Woodcot had another plan in regard to her son, which she persuaded herself could be easily carried out, which would materially better his prospects, and at the same time ensure his happiness. This was to bring about a match between him and her lovely niece, May Radcliffe. She really saw no difficulty in the matter. The young people seemed made for each other. Oswald was a very handsome young fellow—at least, in his mother's opinion—just three years older than his charming cousin, and his disposition was so kind and good that he could not fail to make her happy. The fortune, it is true, was all on May's side, for she could give her son little or nothing; but had he not great expectations from his grandfather, who had almost announced his intention of making him his heir, and who might be induced to do something at once, if the marriage were arranged?

Thus the fond mother argued, and her son was quite of the same opinion, for he was over head and ears in love with his lovely cousin.

Aware of the danger of making a false step in a matter so important—aware also of Mrs. Sutton's influence over her sister, and indeed over Mr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Woodcot endeavoured to secure the housekeeper's assistance, and urged Oswald to conciliate her by every means in his power. Mrs. Sutton—for reasons we have already explained—met him half-way, and soon showed that she was ready to become his ally. Oswald therefore seemed in a fair way of success. But he had not, as yet, received sufficient encouragement from May to warrant a formal declaration. She liked him very much, and was always very happy and cheerful in his society, but she seemed only to regard him as a cousin. Oswald was therefore perplexed, but Mrs. Sutton encouraged

him, though at the same time she recommended him not to be precipitate. Meantime, the house-keeper had cautiously sounded her mistress, and had ascertained that there was no disinclination on her part to the match. Mrs. Radcliffe thought the young people were well suited to each other, and she would not be sorry to have May happily married, though she felt sure Mr. Radcliffe would not like to part with her. Nor was she wrong. When the plan was hinted to him by his wife, he laughed at it, and hoped Oswald had got no such foolish notion into his head. If he thought so, he should be obliged to forbid him the house, and he should be very sorry to do that, on all accounts. He had got a husband for May in his eye; but he did not intend her to marry just at present. Mr. Radcliffe was rather self-willed, and any immediate opposition would only have made him more obstinate. Mrs. Sutton understood him very

well, and knew she could get over the difficulty. But May's heart must first be won. That grand point had yet to be achieved.

Oswald had plenty of opportunity of winning his fair cousin's affections. He was always welcome at Hazlemere, and indeed just as much at home with his uncle, who sincerely liked him, though he objected to him as a son-in-law, as he was with his mother. He therefore came when it suited him, and stayed as long as he pleased. As we have shown, he did not trouble himself much about his profession. He had not even chambers in town. His mother resided in a prettily-situated cottage at Bowdon, in Cheshire, and he made her house his head-quarters. He was fond of hunting and shooting, and as he knew a good many of the Cheshire squires, and visited them, he could always get a mount, though he could not afford to keep a horse, and as much

shooting as he wanted. But with the attraction which it now offered him, we may suppose that he passed most of his time at Hazlemere. Besides wooing his fair cousin, he paid great court to his aunt, made himself as agreeable as he could to his uncle, and did not, we may be sure, neglect Mrs. Sutton. He wrote, now and then, to report progress to his mother—but he could not send her the intelligence she longed for. All, however, was going on prosperously, and Mrs. Sutton was secretly at work for him.

Such was the position of things at Hazlemere, at the time we are about to enter the house, and make acquaintance with its inmates.

We will now return to the party in the dog-cart, whom we left on the way to Hazlemere. Long before they arrived there, Hilary became exceedingly faint, and his head fell upon Oswald's shoulder. Rather alarmed, Mr. Radcliffe acce-

lerated his pace, and soon reached his destination. The lodge gates were open, but instead of pursuing the drive that led to the principal entrance of the mansion, Mr. Radcliffe took a side road to the stables, and committing the injured man to the care of his nephew, and giving some hasty directions to the coachman, who had rushed forth on his arrival, he hurried into the house to prepare Mrs. Sutton for her unexpected patient.

Shortly afterwards, Hilary was led into the house, supported between Oswald and the coachman. He was now almost unconscious, but as he was borne across the spacious hall, the vision of a lovely girl, who seemed to take great interest in him, flitted before his swimming gaze. He saw nothing more. He was taken up-stairs, and transported to a chamber which had been hastily prepared for his reception by Mrs. Sutton.

Hilary passed a very disturbed night. He slept for a few hours, but when he awoke fever had come on. He was quite light-headed, and rambled strangely in his talk. Mrs. Sutton, who had watched anxiously by his couch, and was alone with him at the time, listened with breathless interest to his ravings. A few words which he had let fall fixed her attention, and rising softly from her seat, she drew nearer to him, and gazed eagerly and inquiringly into his face.

Had Mr. Radcliffe seen her at this moment he would not have known her, so changed was her aspect. Her usual calm expression was gone, and had given place to a look of intense emotion such as she never exhibited.

What thoughts passed through her breast as she pursued this agonising scrutiny we shall not inquire. Her emotion became so violent that she feared it would master her. But she neither

cried out, nor fell. Her senses seemed wrapped in the object before her. While she yet gazed at him, incapable of stirring, though so profoundly agitated, the sufferer ceased to rave, and his breathing soon proclaimed that he once more slumbered.

Her life appeared to hang upon the step she next took. Bending forward, and carefully raising the coverlet—so carefully that she did not disturb the sleeper—she laid bare the lower part of his neck, and then discovered the mark she sought.

All doubts were now removed. Her strength deserted her, and she sank back in the chair completely overcome by emotion.

When she recovered, she found that the sufferer was awake and gazing at her with vacant wonder. Her sobs, which she could not check, had roused him. She immediately got up, and

with as much firmness as she could command, offered him a cooling draught. He drank it eagerly, and as he gazed earnestly in her face she had great difficulty in refraining from throwing herself upon his neck. But she took his hand, and held it till he again slumbered; and she then kissed his burning brow.

According to his promise, Mr. Malham came in the morning to see the injured man. By this time the fever had increased, and Hilary's pulse was very high, but the surgeon declared there was no occasion for alarm, and proceeded to dress the sufferer's wounds, and this seemed to afford him sensible relief. Mr. Malham was rather surprised by Mrs. Sutton's anxiety about her patient. He assured her there was no danger, and she could not have treated him better. He smiled as he said this, as if admitting her superior skill. Mr. Malham was a widower, and was looking

out for another wife. Despite his assurance, she still appeared grave and anxious. "My dear madam," he said, giving her hand a gentle professional squeeze, "there is really no cause for uneasiness. You are sure to bring him round."

"I should like to have a word with you before you go, Mr. Malham," she rejoined.

"As many as you please, dear madam," he replied, following her into a dressing-room which opened out of the bed-chamber.

She then obtained from him full particulars as to the attack that had been made by the gipsies upon Mr. St. Ives, and learnt, further, that the police had been hitherto unsuccessful in capturing the robbers.

"Wormald was very confident last night," said the surgeon, "but I saw him only an hour ago, and he was still quite at fault. The rascals have got off. Don't say anything to our patient, as it

may excite him and retard his cure, but I fear he will lose his knapsack, and according to his own account it contained some documents of great importance to him."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Sutton. "Then it is to be hoped he may recover it. Pray who is the young gentleman?"

"Your curiosity about him is very natural, dear madam, and I regret I cannot gratify it. We are all in the dark about him. He gave no account of himself last night, and Mr. Radcliffe was too considerate to ask any questions."

"But I thought he might have said something——"

"He didn't even state where he came from. He merely mentioned his name—Hilary St. Ives."

"I never heard the name before," remarked Mrs. Sutton.

"Nor I," observed the surgeon. "There is

no family of that name hereabouts. If I had any notion who he is, I would write to his friends."

"We must wait till he is able to give the necessary explanation," said Mrs. Sutton. "And I think you will agree with me, that it is best he should not be disturbed to-day—by any one."

"I quite agree with you, dear madam. Just what I, myself, should have recommended. He must be kept quiet—perfectly quiet. I'll enjoin Mr. Radcliffe and Mr. Oswald not to come near him, without your sanction."

And he again smiled tenderly, implying that he would do anything to please her.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Malham," she rejoined. "I won't detain you any longer. Of course I shall see you to-morrow morning?"

"Of course, since you desire it. Ah! dear madam," he sighed, "I feel sometimes very lonely in my widowed home."

Mrs. Sutton took no notice of the remark, but ushered him to the door, and he was obliged reluctantly to depart.

Mr. Malham's injunctions were strictly obeyed. Neither Mr. Radcliffe nor his nephew entered the room occupied by the wounded man. Mrs. Sutton remained with him all day, and attended him with maternal solicitude. His ravings were unheard by any one but herself.

Towards evening the fever began to abate.

III.

MRS. RADCLIFFE.

MRS. RADCLIFFE was in her boudoir, where she always passed the morning, and very often the entire day. The room in which the invalid lady spent so much time was charmingly fitted up, the whole of the furniture being Parisian. While elegance was studied, comfort was not neglected. The boudoir was luxurious as well as tasteful. So soft were the sofas and easy chairs, that they seemed stuffed with eider-down. Delicious little groups copied from Watteau, in

Sèvres china, and the prettiest of pendules, likewise of china, graced the chimney-piece, which was covered with blue velvet, and had curtain screens of the same stuff to moderate the heat of the fire. The skin of a superb tiger, which had been shot in India by Captain Delacombe, lay upon the hearth. Beautiful bronzes adorned the pier-tables, and rare objects of art were displayed in open cabinets. Choice water-colour pictures added to the attractions in the room, and miniatures were hung on either side of the mantel-piece. Rose-coloured curtains subdued the light, and cast a warm glow on the pale cheeks of the invalid. The windows looked out upon the garden, but were rarely opened, for Mrs. Radcliffe could not endure a breath of air. As far as possible an equable temperature was maintained, but it was the temperature of a hothouse, or of an Indian bungalow. Mrs. Radcliffe being a hot-

[illegible]

once threatened her, had disappeared. But she liked to be considered delicate. It served as an excuse for her indolence. A great reader of novels—French as well as English—her mind was tinctured by the class of literature to which she was addicted, and wanted bracing as much as her body. As we have shown, she troubled herself as little as possible about household concerns, and left the management of them entirely to Mrs. Sutton. The nature of a person so constituted could not be otherwise than intensely selfish, yet she was amiable and good-natured when not put out of the way. She was not a tiresome, ever-complaining invalid.

At the time of her introduction to the reader, Mrs. Radcliffe was only just turned forty, and still decidedly handsome, though her charms were somewhat faded. Her blonde tresses had lost their lustre, and acquired a pale ashy hue, but

her complexion was still delicate, though perhaps it derived a little of its bloom from art. Her skin was free from wrinkles, her teeth good, and her features retained their beautiful outline. Her figure was thin, but graceful, and her hands and feet might have served as models to a sculptor. Above all, her eyes had lost little of their beauty and tenderness of expression. How much she was changed from the captivating and coquettish Esther Thornton of former days, could be seen by reference to a charming miniature by Sir William Newton, placed near the chimney-piece. She was not so lovely as that bright-eyed fair-haired girl, but the expression of her features was more agreeable. Faded as she was, Mrs. Radcliffe was still very attractive, and might even now have inspired a passion in the breast of some romantic youth. In her husband's eyes she was quite as beautiful as when he wedded her.

Mrs. Radcliffe had never loved her husband, but she was not unhappy in her married life. Mr. Radcliffe was much older than herself, as we are aware, but he was so fond of her, so indulgent, so anxious to gratify her every whim, that it was impossible not to like him. Then, again, being so great an invalid, she could not mix with society, and had no opportunity of flirting as a married woman, even if she had been inclined to do so. Perhaps her feeble state of health was rather a fortunate circumstance for Mr. Radcliffe. But if we must penetrate into the secret recesses of her breast, we shall discover that she still nourished a tender feeling for Captain Seymour Delacombe, who had been undoubted master of her heart. She had never, however, seen him since her marriage.

Immediately after that event, he had gone out to India, and had been there ever since ; but she

had corresponded with him—of course, with her husband's sanction. Seymour had sought death, it appeared, in many a siege and sharp conflict, but had not found it. On the contrary, he had gained honour and promotion, and was now Colonel Delacombe, C.B.

Mrs. Radcliffe had watched his brilliant career with great interest, but what chiefly gratified her was that he never married. When they parted, twenty years ago, he had vowed, since he could not be blessed with her, never to take another to his breast. And he had kept his vow.

On that afflicting occasion he had given her his miniature, which was now to be seen in the boudoir, hung near the chimney-piece, on the opposite side to her own. To judge from this portrait, Seymour Delacombe must have been exceedingly handsome, with fine dark eyes, a dark complexion, and regular features, marked by a very haughty expression. He was about

five-and-twenty at the time. It may seem strange that Mr. Radcliffe should allow the portrait of one whom he knew had been desperately in love with his wife to hang up in her boudoir. He did not altogether like to see the miniature, but he wisely argued that it might as well be there, as locked up in a drawer.

But if he disregarded this miniature, Mrs. Sutton had an unaccountable dislike to it. She avoided looking at it, and never would admit that she thought it the portrait of a handsome man.

"Ah! you should have seen Seymour when this was taken!" Mrs. Radcliffe often exclaimed. "You could not fail to have been struck by him. He was thought the handsomest man of his day."

Mrs. Sutton replied that he might be handsome, but she didn't like the expression of his countenance.

Upon one occasion, however, when Mrs. Rad-

cliffe entered the boudoir unexpectedly, she caught the housekeeper gazing steadfastly at the miniature.

Despite her habitual self-command, Mrs. Sutton started when thus detected, her embarrassment being increased by her mistress's raillery.

Mrs. Sutton had frequently—far too frequently for her peace—to listen to Mrs. Radcliffe's description of her love-passages with Seymour Delacombe. The housekeeper manifested little interest in these tender and touching details. Apparently, she did not believe in the sincerity of the gallant captain's passion, or in his vows of eternal constancy, for she sometimes smiled rather contemptuously when they were repeated.

"You look incredulous, Sutton," said her mistress. "But you see he has never married."

"There may have been reasons for his not marrying," remarked the housekeeper, dryly.

"What reasons?" cried the lady. "None—save his vow to me."

The same slightly contemptuous smile, that had just before curled Mrs. Sutton's lip, again appeared for an instant.

"You would do well, I think, to forget him," she said.

"I cannot forget him," rejoined Mrs. Radcliffe.

Mrs. Sutton gave her a look, which it was lucky the other did not understand. It was certainly not a look of sympathy. It was rather a look of ill-concealed hate. Had not Mrs. Radcliffe been occupied by her own thoughts, she must have remarked it.

Mrs. Radcliffe, as we have said, was in her charming boudoir, seated in a fauteuil, with her tiny feet supported by a velvet tabouret. With the help of a double eye-glass, of the most graceful workmanship, she was reading the *Court*

Journal. She was dressed in a very becoming deshabille, and seen in that subdued light, with her back to the window, looked almost young. However, there was no one to behold her, except Annette, her lady's-maid, who was taking away the breakfast-things. The invalid lady's breakfast consisted of a cup of chocolate and a little dry toast; and she desired Annette, as the latter left the room, to request Mrs. Sutton to come to her immediately. For a wonder, she had not seen the housekeeper during the whole of the previous day, but she knew how she had been occupied, and therefore excused her. Annette, of course, delivered the message; but Mrs. Sutton was busy at the moment, and nearly an hour elapsed before she complied with it.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Radcliffe had become impatient, and was just about to ring the bell, and inquire what was the matter, when the house-

keeper entered the room, looking graver than usual.

"I ought to scold you, dear Sutton, for neglecting me so shamefully," said Mrs. Radcliffe; "but you look so ill that I cannot find in my heart to do so. I hear you have been sitting up for two nights with this poor young man. You really ought to consider yourself, and should have let one of the men servants sit up with him. How is he going on?" she added, with affected interest.

"He is so much better this morning, that he is able to get up. The fever is quite gone, and Mr. Malham, who has just been to see him, says he will be able to leave his room to-morrow."

"That's very satisfactory. I was afraid it might be a tedious business. What a singular occurrence! I never was more surprised than when I learnt that Mr. Radcliffe had brought a wounded

young man home with him. He was influenced by the kindest motives, no doubt; but——”

“Mr. Radcliffe acted for the best,” interrupted Mrs. Sutton. “I am very glad Mr. St. Ives was brought here. And I am sure you will be of the same opinion.”

“Well, perhaps I shall, especially if you are pleased, Sutton. You must have had a great deal of trouble with him. You look quite worn out.”

“I am not in the least fatigued, and I should not have left him so long as the fever lasted.”

“You are the best of nurses. I have reason to say so. You seem to take a special interest in Mr. St. Ives. I don’t wonder at it. Oswald tells me he is a very fine young man.”

“Mr. Oswald’s description of him is perfectly correct. But it is not on account of his good looks that I am interested in him.”

“Then you own the interest, and yet deny its cause,” remarked Mrs. Radcliffe, smiling. “Had

he been ill-looking you would have felt very differently towards him. What is he like?"

"I will show you who he is like," replied Mrs. Sutton, pointing to the miniature of Captain Delacombe.

"Like Seymour!" exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe, so surprised that her listlessness of manner at once disappeared. "Like Seymour! impossible! You are trifling with me, Sutton."

"He is so like, that the miniature might be taken for him. Now you will understand why I take a particular interest in him."

"What is it you would insinuate, Sutton? Don't agitate me, I entreat of you. You know how unequal I am to the slightest excitement, and such a thing as this might kill me. Give me a few drops."

The housekeeper obeyed the order, remarking as she did so,

"I would not have mentioned the matter, but I feel certain the likeness will be noticed, and I therefore judged it best to prepare you."

"Yes, I think Oswald must have noticed it, for he said yesterday that Mr. St. Ives resembled some one he had seen. He never saw Seymour, of course; but he has seen his portrait. What a commotion you have raised in my breast, Sutton! What a tumult of feelings you have roused!"

"I want you to be calm, for I have something to say to you."

"Something to say!" exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe, alarmed by the housekeeper's manner. "What is it? Have you made a discovery in regard to this young man's parentage? Have you any reason to suspect—ha! Tell me! Don't keep me in this distracting state of suspense! Tell me all, there's a dear, good creature."

"I won't speak, unless you keep quiet. I don't think the likeness *can* be accidental."

"You believe, then, that he is Seymour's son?" cried Mrs. Radcliffe. "But no—no—no! the notion is too absurd to be indulged for a moment."

"Perhaps this signet-ring may afford some evidence," said Mrs. Sutton. "I took it from the dressing-table in his room, and brought it to show you. Do you know Captain Delacombe's arms?"

"Yes; three tigers' heads, with a hand grasping a falchion for crest."

Mrs. Sutton gave her the ring, and begged her to examine it.

"Yes, here they are! here are the tigers' heads, with the crest! This is proof indeed. He *must* be Seymour's son. What age is the young man?"

"Between one and two-and-twenty, as near as I can guess."

"Then he must have been born before Seymour made love to me. He to whom I gave my heart was false and perjured!—oh!" And she sank back, exclaiming, "More drops, Sutton! more drops, or I shall expire!"

Suddenly she started up.

"A terrible thought suggests itself to me!" she exclaimed. "Was Seymour married at the time? Oh, if he was, he was forsworn indeed! Tell me what you think, Sutton."

"I have no thought upon the subject," rejoined the other, coldly.

"Do not spare my feelings. I can bear the truth. Do you think he *was* married?"

"Well, then, since I must give an opinion upon a point of which I can know nothing, I think he was married."

"Ah!" ejaculated the lady, with an hysterical cry. And she again sank back.

As soon as Mrs. Radcliffe's nervous attack, which was rather severe while it lasted, was over, she fixed her humid eyes on the housekeeper, who was standing beside her with a smelling-bottle in her hand, and said,

"I must see this young man, Sutton — this Hilary St. Ives, as he calls himself—I must satisfy myself that he is the person we suppose. You may be mistaken, for you have never seen his—I mean, the original of the miniature. But it is impossible *I* can be deceived. Seymour's image is graven on my heart."

Mrs. Sutton could scarcely hide her disgust.

"I do not think I am mistaken," she replied. "Still, as I am wholly unacquainted with Captain Delacombe, and can judge only of the likeness by the portrait, I may be wrong. On all accounts,

I think it most desirable that you should see the young man ; but you must consider well whether you are equal to the interview. It will not do to exhibit emotion before him, such as you have just displayed."

"I will not betray myself, depend upon it, Sutton. I can see him and converse with him, unmoved—even though he should prove——"

"Well, then, we will go to his room. But first allow me to put away that accusing portrait. Its disappearance may cause some remark, but better that, than it should be examined just now by the servants, or any one else."

So saying, without waiting for permission, she took down the miniature and locked it up in the bureau, of which she possessed the key.

"You are sure you are quite equal to the effort?" she then added.

Mrs. Radcliffe replied that she was quite sure,

and immediately arose with a very unwonted display of ardour. Her sensibilities were really aroused, and she was almost in a youthful flutter of anxiety.

Before leaving the boudoir with the housekeeper, she surveyed herself in the mirror, and slightly arranged her toilette and her hair.

IV.

THE INTERVIEW.

It was a very unusual thing indeed for the invalid lady to leave her room at this hour, and Annette, who chanced to be on the landing, wondered to see her issue forth.

"Mrs. Sutton wishes me to see Mr. St. Ives," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe, thinking it best to give an explanation.

"The poor young gentleman is in the dressing-room, me'm," replied Annette. "Boston has just left him."

"I will go on first, if you please," said Mrs. Sutton, stepping forward quickly towards the further end of the corridor, where the chamber they sought was situated.

Hilary had left his bed an hour ago. Boston, the valet, had brought him a change of linen, with several articles of apparel, furnished by good-natured Oswald Woodcot, and had assisted to dress him.

Mrs. Sutton's first business was to lay the signet-ring on the dressing-table. Hilary had not missed it.

The young man was reclining on a couch, wrapped in a dressing-gown. As may naturally be expected, he looked very pale, but this did not impair his good looks, but rather lent interest to his countenance.

Notwithstanding her boasted firmness, Mrs. Radcliffe well-nigh betrayed herself by a scream,

and the housekeeper, perceiving her agitation, stepped between her and the young man to give her time to recover. Hilary had raised himself on her entrance, and when informed that the lady of the house had come to inquire after him, he expressed his sense of her kindness in suitable terms.

Not only was the face Seymour's, but the voice and manner were Seymour's. Mrs. Radcliffe thought she beheld her old lover again. No doubt it was a trying moment, and it is really wonderful that she maintained her self-possession at all.

But what shall we say of Mrs. Sutton? Could the mingled feelings with which she looked on be discerned in her countenance? Not in the least. To all outward appearance she was perfectly calm. Perhaps she was secretly well pleased by the effect produced upon her mistress by Hilary.

On his part, the young man was most favourably impressed by the lady, though quite unable to account for the interest she evidently took in him. He thought her very handsome, and singularly kind and agreeable in manner. She put several questions to him calculated to elicit information as to his history and position in life, but he was very guarded in his answers, and she could only ascertain that he had been brought up at Exeter, and had recently been in France, and that his nearest living relative—he did not say his father—was in India.

On all points he maintained great reserve.

He did not even explain the business that had brought him into this part of the country, though he lamented the loss of his papers.

At last, Mrs. Radcliffe mustered courage to put a question to him which she had all along been dying to ask.

He had said his nearest relative was in India.

Was his mother still alive?

The question saddened him. She was dead.

Mrs. Radcliffe was sorry to have asked the question. But she ventured to inquire further if his mother had been dead long?

She died many years ago—during his infancy—he did not even remember her. He had never known a mother's care.

These words, which caused a sharp pang in Mrs. Sutton's breast, and made her put her hand to her heart, gave immense relief to Mrs. Radcliffe. Seymour was not the traitor she had deemed him. She glanced at the housekeeper, but was struck by her expression of pain, and inquired anxiously what was the matter. It was only a slight spasm.

"I am the cause of your illness, I fear," said Hilary. "You have been watching by me for two nights."

"No, it is not that. I am accustomed to nursing. But I have not been very well of late. It is gone." And she forced a rather ghastly smile, adding, "I have only performed the office which your mother would have discharged had she been living."

"No mother could have watched over a son more carefully than you have watched over me," said Hilary, with a deeply grateful look. "Nay, when my fever was at its height, I thought you were my mother come to life again, and standing beside me."

"You were delirious for a time," Mrs. Sutton hastened to remark, "and rambled strangely."

"Yes, I suppose I did. Without you I am certain my cure would not have been so soon accomplished. My strength has almost returned. To-morrow," he added to Mrs. Radcliffe, "I hope I shall be able to relieve you of any further

trouble respecting me. I shall never forget the kindness I have experienced."

"You must not think of leaving us till you are perfectly recovered. Besides, to-morrow is my daughter May's birthday, and she has always a little fête on the occasion, at which I hope you may be well enough to assist."

"If Mr. St. Ives keeps perfectly quiet to-day, I have no doubt he will be able to come downstairs to-morrow," observed Mrs. Sutton; "but he overrates his strength."

"You hear that," observed Mrs. Radcliffe. "You are not yet dismissed as cured."

"I am in too good quarters to feel any anxiety to leave them," rejoined Hilary. "I need scarcely say that it would delight me to be presented to Miss Radcliffe, but——"

"I will take no refusal. I shall be hurt if you leave to-morrow, and so will Mr. Radcliffe.

You are his guest, you know. Unless you have some particular reason for early departure, stay with us a few days to recruit."

"The invitation is so kindly given, and is in itself so tempting, that I must accept it. I cannot offer the excuse of business. Since I have lost my papers, I have really nothing to do."

"It is too soon to despair of recovering them. They will turn up again, I have no doubt. And now you will understand that you are to make yourself quite at home. Mrs. Sutton will take every care of you."

"That I will," said the housekeeper, smiling.

The arrangement was precisely what she desired.

"I feel as if I were in a dream—and a very pleasant dream it is!" cried Hilary. "All sorts of strange fancies possess me," he added, gazing alternately at Mrs. Radcliffe and the housekeeper.

"Your brain is still a little heated, I perceive," said the lady.

"Yes," observed Mrs. Sutton, signifying by a glance that they had better withdraw.

Mrs. Radcliffe, therefore, rose to depart, but before she left the room, she said,

"I hope you will be able to join the breakfast-party to-morrow, Mr. St. Ives. I will tell May that she may expect to see you."

"I will come, if my kind nurse will allow me," he replied.

"What do you think of him?" inquired Mrs. Sutton, as they returned to the boudoir.

"He is the very image of Seymour. I did not venture to question him about his father; but I am sure he is Seymour's son. I think I did right to ask him to stay. The impulse was irresistible."

"You couldn't have done otherwise."

"I am glad you think so. Do you know, Sutton, I almost felt towards him as if he were my own son."

"The feeling was not unnatural. I am sure he is sensible of the interest you take in him."

"He seemed so. I shall never be able to part with him."

Mrs. Sutton smiled. The right effect had been produced.

"Perhaps he has been neglected by his father from some cause," she remarked, "and you may be the means of setting him right. Who knows?"

"His coming here looks like fatality," said Mrs. Radcliffe, who had become unusually pensive. "We shall learn more of his history in time, and then I will consider how to act. Try to find out if he wants anything, Sutton. I am afraid he is poor."

"I am afraid so. But unless I am mistaken in him, he is too proud to accept assistance."

"Still, we may help him. Something may be done. I tell you I feel like a mother towards him."

"That is clear; and he could not scruple to receive a mother's aid. But it would be difficult to make this intelligible to him. However, I will do my best to carry out your wishes. I suppose you will breakfast with the party to-morrow?"

"I shall make an effort to do so—on his account."

"You promised to have a little conversation with Mr. Radcliffe about Mr. Oswald's suit."

"I did. But I think I shall defer it. There is no hurry. Mr. Radcliffe does not like the subject, as you are aware."

"I promised Mr. Oswald to remind you."

"I did not require to be reminded. But I

shall have too much to do to-morrow to attend to the matter. To be plain, I want to ascertain what May thinks of young St. Ives before I stir further in Oswald's favour. Perhaps, she may like him."

Mrs. Sutton secretly exulted, but was careful to hide her exultation.

"I do not think May cares much for her cousin," she remarked.

"You appeared to think otherwise a few days ago. Have you altered your opinion?"

"I am still as favourable as ever to Mr. Oswald's suit. But I repeat I do not think May cares much about him."

"I am glad to learn that her heart is disengaged. That leaves me free to act. When you go down-stairs send her to me."

"Pray be careful what you say to her, or you may do mischief."

"Don't fear me. I shall talk to her chiefly about young St. Ives. She is curious about him, and was interested by his appearance here, and was interested by his appearance."

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Sutton quit dinner, and sent May to her, as desired.

V.

MAY AND HER MOTHER.

A SWEET musical voice in the passage. The door opened, and May entered the boudoir, bearing a little basket of flowers. Flora herself could not have looked more fresh and blooming.

She had just been summoned from the garden by Mrs. Sutton, and had not taken off the dainty little straw hat with which her blonde tresses were crowned. What a winsome smile upon her rosy lips. And what pearls those lips revealed.

Mrs. Radcliffe regarded her with pride, not

unmingled with a slight feeling of envy. Her own faded charms suffered sadly by contrast with those of her lovely daughter.

“Good morrow, dearest mamma,” cried May, kissing her affectionately. “I hope you are quite well this morning. You look so. I have brought you a few flowers. Oh! it is such an enchanting day. There has been a slight shower—the last shower of April—and now the sun is shining so brightly, and the birds are singing so blithely, and everything is looking so deliciously spring-like. Do let me persuade you to take a turn in the garden. You will enjoy it so much, and I am sure it will do you good. Shut up in this close room you can have no idea of the beauty and freshness of the morning. Oh! how I long to open the window.”

“On no account,” said Mrs. Radcliffe, checking her. “The air is far too chilly for me. At

your age I delighted in a walk on a fine spring day like this, but now I am a poor invalid, and must be content with my boudoir. Thank you for these flowers, my love. They are very beautiful, but the odour of these jonquils is too strong to be agreeable. Put the basket aside, please. Now, come and sit near me, and let us talk."

May obeyed, drew a chair towards her mother, and fixed her large blue eyes inquiringly upon her.

"To-morrow is the first of May," said Mrs. Radcliffe, taking her hand. "To-morrow you will be nineteen, the brightest and happiest season in a woman's existence—at least, it is generally so considered, though in my own instance it proved otherwise. At nineteen I was far from happy." She sighed, and then added, "But I am sure *you* are happy, darling."

"Indeed I am, dearest mamma—truly happy. I have not a wish ungratified."

"Not one?" asked her mother. "Take care, I am about to catechise you. But before I begin I will make a little confession which may encourage you to deal frankly with me. It may make you smile, but I shall not smile at any avowal it may elicit from you. Don't interrupt me. At nineteen—I may say it now, since I am an old woman—I was very much admired, and I am afraid you will think I must have been excessively silly when I own that I was pleased with the admiration I excited. I was thought a great flirt. I see you are beginning to laugh already, and you have a perfect right to do so, for you are entirely free from the faults which I have just admitted."

"Dear mamma, I am not laughing," remarked May, trying to look grave.

"Listen to me," resumed Mrs. Radcliffe.
"Amongst my host of admirers there was only

one who really interested me, and before I was aware of it he had contrived to win my heart. Your grandpapa, who was resolved that I should never, with his consent, marry any other than a man of fortune, forbade me to think of the person on whom I had foolishly fixed my affections. Ah! what a struggle it cost me to obey. Recollect that this was at nineteen—your own age, darling. I had no tender mother into whose pitying breast I could pour my grief. Sympathy from my father I had none.”

Here she paused for a few moments, overpowered by her recollections.

“Of course,” she continued, “all has turned out for the best. I was very silly then. Your grandpapa—stern as I deemed him—was quite right, and I was quite wrong. But I did not think so at the time—and I was wretched. Now, my dear child,” she added, looking into

her daughter's face, "you will not, after this confession, withhold your confidence from me. You are not circumstanced as I was, darling. Your papa will never oppose your inclinations—nor will I. We both love you tenderly. You are not a flirt—but a pretty girl, with a good fortune, *must* have admirers. I had no fortune. If you have a preference for any of your *pretendants*—as I fancy you have—do not hesitate to avow it."

"Really, dear mamma," replied May, who had listened with some surprise to this address, "I scarcely know how to answer you. It would be ridiculous in me to pretend I am not aware that some young men who come here do pay me attention. But I have never thought seriously about any of them."

"But there is a young man who is *in* the house—what of him?"

"Make yourself quite easy, dear mamma. I have not lost my heart to cousin Oswald."

"Cousin Oswald—or I am very much mistaken—thinks otherwise."

"So he may—so, perhaps, he does—but he is a silly fellow so to delude himself. I like Oswald. He has excellent qualities, and a disposition that might attach any one to him. I know he is devoted to me; but for all that I cannot love him—except as a cousin. There, mamma, do you now understand?"

"Perfectly, my love," replied Mrs. Radcliffe, dissembling her satisfaction. "I am rather sorry for poor Oswald."

"Yes, I am sometimes sorry for him myself. But what am I to do? How am I to cure him without giving him pain? Whenever I am about to speak seriously to him, he looks at me so imploringly that I cannot find in my heart to crush

his hopes altogether. So we go on. He follows me about like papa's great water-spaniel, Neptune, and I treat him much as I treat Neptune. I believe if I were to throw a stick into the lake, and bid Oswald fetch it, he would plunge in at once as readily as Neptune."

And she laughed heartily at the notion.

Mrs. Radcliffe smiled secretly, but remarked, "I am shocked to hear you compare your good-natured and devoted cousin to a water-spaniel."

"I am a friend to dogs, for they are honest creatures, as Pierre says in the play, mamma. Oswald is as honest and good a creature as ever lived, and has the fidelity and attachment of a dog, so I think the comparison is not so very inappropriate. Have you finished your catechism?"

"Quite; I find I shall have nothing to say to your papa on your birthday."

"Papa won't be sorry for that, I think," remarked the young lady, archly.

"Well, let us change the topic, my love. I have just been to see poor Mr. St. Ives. Thanks to Mrs. Sutton's care, he has almost recovered from the injuries he received from the robbers. All the circumstances attending his arrival here are so singular that my curiosity has been greatly excited about him."

"So has mine, mamma. Tell me what he is like, in the first place?"

"You saw him when he was brought into the house, and can judge of his appearance."

"True; but he looked so dreadfully pale then. I thought him dying. He appeared to be very handsome."

"He has quite what the French call '*l'air d'un grand seigneur*.' I was very much struck, I assure you, and from the first moment felt an interest in

him, for which I find it difficult to account. This sort of thing is very unusual with me, for I rarely take an interest in a perfect stranger. But Mr. St. Ives is not an ordinary person."

"He seems a very mysterious person, mamma. Papa and Oswald can tell me nothing about him. Have you learnt any particulars?"

"The principal features of his history, so far as I can ascertain them, are these: He has been brought up at Exeter, and has recently been in France, where I fancy he has relatives. He lost his mother in infancy; and his father, I believe—for this is mere surmise on my part—is in India."

"How came he to be crossing Wootton Heath on the night when he was robbed?"

"He seems to have been on his way to town, and had with him, in his knapsack, some important documents, of which, unluckily, he has been deprived by the robbers."

"So I heard," cried May. "I want to know what those documents relate to."

"Then you must suspend your curiosity till to-morrow, when you will probably see him, and can question him, if you think proper. If he is able to do so, he will come down to breakfast in the morning. I took care to tell him that it is an interesting anniversary."

"The anniversary can have no interest to him," observed May.

"Pardon me, my love; he was much flattered by being allowed to join the family party on such an occasion."

At this moment the door was partially opened, and a good-humoured, good-looking face was seen at it.

The face was Oswald's. He asked if he might come in.

VI.

OSWALD.

RECEIVING permission, he shut the door and advanced, but his aunt motioned him to keep off.

“You have been smoking, Oswald. Give him some eau-de-Cologne, May.”

Instantly retiring, Oswald took a seat on a causeuse on the opposite side of the fireplace.

Undoubtedly, he was a very handsome young fellow, tall, well built, and well set on his lower limbs, which, as he wore knickerbockers, could be

seen to be remarkably well turned. He had an open countenance, brown curling locks, whiskers a few shades lighter than his hair, and brushed back according to the prevailing mode, regular features, light grey eyes, and a fresh complexion, denoting the most perfect health. Not, perhaps, a very intellectual face, but a very pleasant one, nevertheless. Considering his personal advantages and his devotion, it is rather surprising that May should care so little about him.

"What has brought you here, Oswald?" inquired his aunt.

"I have a piece of news for you," he replied.

"I have just got a letter from my mother. Who do you think is coming here to-morrow?"

"Your mother!" cried Mrs. Radcliffe.

"I hope so," added May. "I shall be delighted to see her."

"No," rejoined Oswald, laughing. "Your

grandpapa is coming. Perhaps you won't be quite so delighted to see *him*."

Exclamations of surprise were uttered both by mamma and daughter.

Oswald easily perceived, from the expression of his aunt's face, that the intelligence was not altogether agreeable to her. At any other time she would have been glad to see her father; but at this particular juncture, when Hilary St. Ives was in the house, and when she had a little project on foot in regard to him, the shrewd and suspicious old gentleman was very likely to be in the way, and might interfere with her plan. Besides, *he* had known Seymour Delacombe intimately in days gone by, and would naturally be struck by the likeness borne to him by Hilary. These reflections passed rapidly through her mind, and gave to her countenance the expression noticed by Oswald.

"I wonder your grandpapa has not written to

me to announce his intention," she observed, in a tone that showed she was a little put out.

"He felt sure he would be welcome, as he will be, mamma," said May. "It is long since dear grandpapa has paid us a visit. I am glad he is coming at last."

"Yes; I only wish he had deferred his visit for a week," objected her mother. "Poor Mr. St. Ives has got his room, and, as you know, your grandpapa is very particular, and won't be satisfied with any other room than the one he is accustomed to."

"Why shouldn't he have it?" cried Oswald. "St. Ives must turn out. Luckily he's well enough, or will be well enough to-morrow to take his departure."

"I've asked him to stay here for a week to recruit," said Mrs. Radcliffe, in a tone of rebuke. "Sutton will find him another room."

"Very kind of you indeed, aunt," said Oswald,

a little abashed, and secretly wishing that the young man had never got into the house at all.

"Have the robbers been caught, Oswald? Has Mr. St. Ives's knapsack been recovered?" inquired May.

"No. Wormald, the police-officer, has just been here. Still at fault, though he is not without hopes of capturing the gipsies; for he thinks they are concealed in the neighbourhood. Poor St. Ives, I fear, has said good-bye to his precious documents."

"Apparently, they are a great loss to him," observed May, in a sympathising tone.

"If he wants them back he ought to offer a jolly good reward for them," cried Oswald. "But I say, aunt, what has become of the miniature that used to hang up there? I mean the portrait of——"

Seeing from his aunt's looks that he had

asked the wrong question, he stopped short, though he had some observations to make.

"You have no business to be so inquisitive, sir," said Mrs. Radcliffe, in a tone calculated to check further remarks on the subject, and it had the effect desired.

"Aunt Bell, I trust, gives a good account of herself?" interposed May, coming to the rescue.

"You shall see her letter," he replied, giving it to her.

"What a very long letter! Must I read it aloud?" she inquired.

"By all means," he replied, with affected non-chalance. "There are no secrets in it. It relates chiefly to yourself. I ought, perhaps, to have kept it back till to-morrow—but no matter."

May then read as follows :

"Your time seems to have been so fully and

agreeably occupied, you dear, undutiful boy, that you appear not to have had a moment to spare for your poor mother, who has been anxiously expecting a letter from you for the last fortnight, and has been doomed to constant disappointment. After so prolonged a silence you ought to have something pleasant to communicate.

“Your last letter, now nearly three weeks old—think of that, sir!—was full of rapturous descriptions of May—as if I didn’t know how lovely and amiable she is—and the impression it conveyed, whether designed or not on your part, is that you have fallen in love with your charming cousin.”

“I think I had better not read any more,” said May, stopping.

“Oh yes, pray go on,” Oswald entreated.

“I shall not be surprised if it turns out to be so, for it is scarcely possible to be constantly in

the society of so adorable a creature as May without becoming passionately enamoured of her. Such, at least, is my notion. And I remember the time when your aunt, who was quite as pretty as May now is, could not avoid making conquests of all who came near her."

"What do you think of that, mamma?" asked May, pausing. "I hope you are flattered."

Gross as it was, the flattery was not a whit too strong for Mrs. Radcliffe. But she said,

"I wonder your Aunt Bell could write so silly a letter. But let us hear it out."

"I think I have divined your secret, my dear boy, but you do not throw any light on a point that is naturally of the utmost interest to me. You tell me you are May's constant companion, in her walks, in her rides, in her drives. You say she sings and plays so divinely, that you could listen to her for ever. You say you act as her

head-gardener, and would act as her groom if she would let you; and you mention several other particulars that prove how devoted you are to her; but you do *not* tell me the one thing I most desire to know. You do not even hint that your charming cousin, with whom you are evidently smitten, manifests the slightest predilection for you."

Here Oswald coughed slightly. May, however, would not raise her eyes from the letter to look at him, but went on.

"A mother's vanity may mislead me, but I cannot think, from the opportunities she has of knowing them, that May can be insensible to your many good qualities; or, shall I say it?—indifferent to your personal advantages. I fondly persuade myself that the attachment must be mutual. You have a noble and true heart, my dear boy, if you have not the cleverest head in

the world. In some respects, and these not the least important to her happiness, May will not find your superior. That I can affirm. I have long entertained the idea that you are formed for each other. Heaven grant you may be united !”

“Amen !” ejaculated Oswald, fervently.

“Is there much more ?” inquired Mrs. Radcliffe.

“Yes, a good deal, mamma.”

“Pray stop, if you have had enough,” said Oswald.

But May went on.

“As I cannot divest myself of the impression, that you and your fair cousin will make a match of it (or, as your Aunt Radcliffe used to say, when a girl, ‘put up your horses in the same stable’), I have written to your grandpapa to press him to make a settlement upon you. He is very rich, and lives so inexpensively, that a few thousands

can be no object whatever to him. You are certain to be his heir; but he is hale and hearty, and has such a capital constitution, that he may, and I sincerely hope, will, last for several years. May is a great favourite with him, and since there is every prospect of your being united to her, I feel pretty sure he will place you in an independent position, and remove any obstacles that might otherwise arise on that score. As he is as punctual as the Duke of Wellington used to be, and sure to reply without delay, I won't send off this letter till I hear from him."

"Has she got his answer?" inquired Mrs. Radcliffe.

"Yes, dear aunt, yes," replied Oswald, eagerly.

"Do finish the letter, May."

"I told you I should not be kept long in suspense. To my great surprise, and no less to my delight, your grandpapa has answered my

letter in person, and is now with me at Dunham Lodge. He is in very good humour, and apparently much pleased with the idea of the match. He won't make any positive promise, but I think he will do what we desire. That he means to do something is certain, for he has determined to start for Hazlemere House at once, and ascertain by personal inspection, as he says, 'how the land lies.'

"To-morrow he will be in town, and stay at the Langham Hotel, and on the following morning, 1st of May, will run down to Hazlemere. He is an odd man, as your aunt knows full well, and his design is to take her by surprise; but I think she ought to be prepared for his visit.

"It now only remains for me, in concluding this long letter, to wish dearest May many, many happy returns of her birthday. May the day prove auspicious; and a long and blissful term, in

which she and you will be principally concerned, date from it. How proud and happy your mother will be, if her fond anticipations are realised."

"That is all," observed May, putting down the letter.

"And enough too," said her mother.

Small need, we think, to state that Mrs. Woodcot's letter was meant to be shown to Mrs. Radcliffe and May, but that clever lady never supposed her son would allow it to be read under such absurd circumstances as those recorded. The comical intonation given by May to certain passages, on which he had most relied, entirely destroyed their effect, and before the letter was ended, he perceived the mistake he had made, and became very hot and confused. Not knowing what to say, he cast one of those imploring looks, to which she was accustomed, at his fair cousin; but she was not to be moved now.

At last he stammered out, "I should never have ventured upon a declaration, if I had not been prompted by that unlucky letter. But do let me learn my fate."

"Your fate is not in my hands," replied May. "I have no other answer to give to such a question. What can you have been saying about me to Aunt Bell to cause her to write to grandpapa as she has done? You have placed me in a very ridiculous position."

"I will ask pardon on my bended knees, if that will soften you," he cried, about to suit the action to the word.

"Remain where you are, sir. I cannot treat this as a jest. Grandpapa is coming. How is he to be undeceived?"

"I don't know," rejoined Oswald, driven to his wits' end. "But, upon my honour, I had no idea my mother would write to him, still less that

the old gentleman would come here to perplex us."

"No, you could not possibly foresee that, Oswald," observed his aunt. "Your mother should not have been so precipitate. But I understand her feelings, and can excuse her. You must make allowances for Oswald, May. It was natural that he should delude himself."

"Thank you, aunt, thank you," he cried, gratefully. "I certainly believed—that is, I fancied May was not quite indifferent to me."

"Perhaps I have been to blame," said May, relenting. "You are not the only person who has been deceived by my manner," she added, glancing archly at her mother. "So take my forgiveness."

And she extended her hand towards him, which he pressed eagerly to his lips.

"I suspect she loves him, in spite of her denial," thought Mrs. Radcliffe.

"I hope grandpapa's errand won't be altogether fruitless," said May. "Mamma, you must try and persuade him to do something for poor Oswald."

"Nay, my love, it rests with you, and not with me. On one condition, no doubt your grandpapa will do something."

"But that condition I cannot agree to," she rejoined.

"Ah!" exclaimed Oswald, despairingly. "Don't trouble yourselves about me," he added, with a broken-hearted expression. "I care for nothing now. I shall go abroad. I don't know what I shall do. But I shall not remain longer here."

"Not if I beg you to stay?" said May, in a coaxing tone that was quite irresistible.

"I will do whatever you bid me," he replied, with the submission of a slave.

"Then I order you to remain over my birth-

day," she said. "You shall go when you please afterwards."

Just then an interruption was offered by the entrance of Mr. Radcliffe, who came in quest of Oswald.

"I thought I should find you here," he said, clapping his nephew on the shoulder as he advanced to greet his wife, whom he had not seen before on that morning.

VII.

MR. RADCLIFFE.

MR. RADCLIFFE was turned sixty, rather above the middle size, and had the portly figure and large features which *Punch* is wont to assign to John Bull. He looked the picture of good health, and, though stout, he was active, and took a great deal of exercise, living as much as he could in the open air. He wore rather large whiskers, which, with his snow-white locks, contrasted forcibly with his rosy complexion. He did not wear the traditional John Bull top-boots, but his

sturdy legs were clothed in a pair of Mr. Bowley's incomparable cool gaiters. He had a loose blue coat with brass buttons, and a baggy waistcoat. Mr. Radcliffe's manner towards his wife was singularly deferential, and it was evident she had lost none of her influence over him. Years had in no degree diminished his admiration of her beauty.

Mrs. Radcliffe thought it best to let him know immediately that her father was coming on the following day, and though much surprised, he was greatly pleased by the intelligence. The difficulty in regard to the room in which Hilary St. Ives was lodged at once occurred to him, as it had done to his wife. But this was soon got over.

All being settled, Mr. Radcliffe chuckled, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction at the thought of seeing his father-in-law, whom he liked very much.

"I must get out some of my '20 port for him," he cried, smacking his lips. "He will want a glass of it to drink your health, May, and so shall I—ha! ha!" And he laughed his resonant laugh. "Oswald must drink it in claret, since he can't stand port. By-the-by, I had forgotten what I came about," addressing his nephew. "Mrs. Sutton wants to go to Guildford on some business of her own. You must drive her in the dog-cart to the Gomshall station. I can't very well spare the time myself. Besides, I expect some people to call upon me."

"I shall like it of all things," replied Oswald. "But I suppose I shan't have to wait at the station till she comes back from Guildford."

"No—no—she won't return till late. A fly will bring her home."

"This must be a sudden idea," exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe, surprised. "Sutton was with me just

now, and said nothing about going to Guildford. What is to happen to poor Mr. St. Ives?"

"Oh! he'll take no harm," replied her husband. "Boston will look after him. He has got the *Times*, and a book to amuse him—and can have a cigar if he likes. No, I beg pardon, my love. I know you don't allow smoking in the bedrooms."

"I wish I could prevent it everywhere else in the house. But I want to know why Sutton is going to Guildford."

"She wants to go to the bank, I believe, my dear. You had better not keep her waiting, Oswald. The dog-cart has been ordered a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh! I didn't understand that," cried the young man. And with an expressive look at May, he quitted the room.

Mrs. Radcliffe was puzzled, but she fancied

this sudden expedition to Guildford had some relation to Hilary St. Ives. What surprised her most was, that Mrs. Sutton had not consulted her before taking the step. However, she could not ask further questions, without appearing too curious.

"I fancy Sutton has saved money," observed Mr. Radcliffe.

"I dare say she has," she replied.

This was a very evasive, and by no means truthful, response. She knew perfectly well that the housekeeper *had* saved what Oswald would have called "a pot of money."

"Well, May," said her father, looking at her, "now that Oswald is gone, I have something to tell you."

"What is it, dear papa?" she inquired. "Why should it be a secret from Oswald?"

"I scarcely know why," he replied, smiling.

"But you shall judge whether I have acted discreetly, or not. I have just received a proposal of marriage for you. Now, was I right in reserving this communication for your own ear, and for that of your mamma?"

"You were quite right, papa," she replied.

"Does the offer meet your approval, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Radcliffe, not feeling at all certain from her husband's manner that it did so.

"I can raise no objection to it. On the contrary, I am bound to say that, viewed in a certain light, the offer is highly advantageous. Not to keep you a moment longer in suspense," he added to May, "it is Sir Charles Ilminster of Boxgrove Park, who, through me, offers you his hand."

May did not make a remark, but, from having blushed deeply, she became quite pale.

"I shall not attempt to influence you one way

or the other, my love," said her father, kindly.

"You must consider well before you decide."

"You are the kindest papa in the world," she cried, flinging her arms round his neck.

Mrs. Radcliffe thought it behoved her to say a few words.

"Most girls would think that an offer from a handsome young baronet, with a fine place, did not require much consideration" she observed.

"Sir Charles Ilminster is thirty-five, mamma."

"I like that. Thirty-five is young for a baronet. Sir Charles is in the prime of life. He belongs to an old family—one of the oldest in the county. His estates are unencumbered, I believe. To add to his numerous recommendations, he stands quite alone. There is no Dowager Lady Ilminster. He has only a sister, Lady Richborough, a widow, and a most charming person."

"I quite agree with you, mamma, Lady Richborough is charming."

"Is not Sir Charles charming?"

"Agreeable, gentleman-like, good-looking—yes. Charming—no."

"Boxgrove, I repeat, is an exceedingly fine place."

"Granted. But I like Hazlemere quite as well."

"Absurd. The two places cannot be compared. Boxgrove is an ancient mansion, with a noble park. Our's is—but I won't depreciate it. You are sadly wanting in taste, my love, and I fear in discrimination. The main point is, whether you at all like Sir Charles."

"I neither like him, nor dislike him, mamma. I am simply indifferent about him."

"You will have to make up your mind by to-morrow, my dear," said her father. "He is

coming over with Lady Richborough and will expect an answer."

"I will give Lady Richborough my answer," said May.

"Incomprehensible girl!" cried her mother.

"Well, do as you please," observed Mr. Radcliffe. "I've said I won't influence you, and I'll keep my word. But I am bound to confirm all your mamma has said about Sir Charles Ilminster. A wrong conclusion might be drawn from my silence. And now, my dear," he added to his wife, "you must excuse me. I can't stand the heat of this room any longer. It feels like a furnace."

"I feel it very warm, too, papa," cried May.

"I must have a turn in the garden."

And they quitted the room together.

"We shall see what effect Hilary will produce," mused Mrs. Radcliffe, as she was left alone. "He

is far handsomer than Sir Charles, and much younger. But then he has nothing. I wonder why Sutton has gone to Guildford."

May and her father reached the garden just in time to see the dog-cart, with Mrs. Sutton and Oswald inside it, dash through the lodge-gates. The young man waved his hand to them.

Another person, stationed at the window of an upper chamber, watched them as they moved slowly across the lawn.

This person was ravished by May's beauty. Never had he beheld a countenance so enchanting, nor a figure so light and graceful. His heart was lost to her at once.

VIII.

SIR CHARLES ILMINSTER AND LADY RICHBOROUGH.

THE dog-cart was on its way to the station.

Those within it ought to have been enlivened by the rare beauty of the morning, and by the smiling aspect of nature ; but they were not. The conversation, commenced by Oswald, soon dropped. Mrs. Sutton was evidently preoccupied, and would not give heed to his talk.

They had crossed a breezy common—not the heath upon which Hilary had been lost, but an equally picturesque tract—and soon afterwards

entered a long defile, if it may be properly so termed, which led them between the North Downs.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the pass. A small river took its course through the narrow valley, and the road skirting its banks offered charming points of view. In many cases the sides of the downs were clothed with timber, while the mansions to which those woods belonged could be descried through openings amid the trees.

One of the most extensive and most beautiful of the parks in question belonged to Sir Charles Ilminster, of whom mention has just been made. Sir Charles's noble ancestral mansion occupied a commanding situation, and overlooked the whole of the lovely surrounding district.

Drawn by Spanker, the dog-cart was going at a rattling pace past the tall grey palings that

served to keep the deer within Boxgrove Park, when a turn in the road showed Oswald a lady and gentleman on horseback, followed by a groom, about a quarter of a mile ahead.

In these persons he had no difficulty in recognising the owner of the adjoining property, and his sister, Lady Richborough.

As Sir Charles and the lady with him were proceeding very leisurely, the intervening distance was soon cleared by Spanker. The groom touched his hat as the dog-cart passed him, and his master and Lady Richborough, hearing the sound of wheels, turned to see who was coming on.

Both were extremely well mounted. Sir Charles had a decidedly military look and bearing—not surprising, since he had been in the —th Lancers, and had served with distinction. He had a tall, symmetrical figure; handsome, but rather pro-

nounced features ; and wore thick moustaches and a long imperial.

High-bred, high-minded, high-spirited, chivalrous, Sir Charles was the soul of honour, and had a spice of romance in his composition.

Ten years younger than her brother, Lady Richborough was in the full *éclat* of her resplendent beauty. Magnificent black hair, eyes of almost Oriental size and splendour, veiled by long dark eyelashes, classically cut features, a full mouth, and rounded chin, these constituted some of her charms. To her personal attractions she added most fascinating manners, and a remarkable power of pleasing when she cared to exert it. A perfect Amazon, she never looked better than on horseback. She sat her steed well, and her riding-habit brought out the best points of her superb figure.

The widow of Sir Algernon Richborough, a

Yorkshire baronet, who unfortunately had a son by a former marriage, besides other children, her charming ladyship had a tolerably good jointure. But, alas! a very harsh restriction was attached to it.

Sir Algernon was of a jealous nature, and had not sufficient confidence in his lovely wife. Not believing she would be faithful to his memory, he decreed that her jointure should depart from her if she married again. But for this proceeding, which we cannot too strongly condemn, it is certain Lady Richborough would not have remained two years a widow.

How dreadfully mercenary are the young men of the day! A thousand charms, without money, will not fix them. The report that Lady Richborough would lose her jointure on marriage scared all her young admirers. Some more mature pretendants, with better taste and larger means,

would not have minded the loss. But they did not suit Lady Richborough, who was determined upon having a young partner in her second *noces*.

It remains only to state that the lovely widow had a house in Eaton-place. But she only occupied it during the season, and generally took care of her brother at Boxgrove.

Only of late, Sir Charles Ilminster had become intimate with the Radcliffes, and the intimacy was brought about by the great fancy taken for May by Lady Richborough.

Sir Charles, who was said to have had an early disappointment, from which he had never entirely recovered, and which had hitherto prevented him from marrying, was not proof against the charms of the youthful beauty. May's freshness and vivacity enchanted him, and though the connexion was not exactly one he would have sought if his feelings had not been strongly engaged, he began

seriously to entertain the idea of making her his wife.

Before taking the decisive step, however, he consulted his sister. She had already perceived the effect produced upon him, and in reality had helped to fan the flame by her praises of the object of his regards; and, as may be supposed, he met with no opposition from her. On the contrary, she applauded his choice, and counselled him not to lose time, but secure the prize, lest it should slip through his fingers.

This argument, of which he recognised the full force, prevailed, and induced him to make the formal proposal just reported to the reader. The groom having delivered the letter containing the proposal, had rejoined his master, who had ridden on to Wootton, and Sir Charles was returning to Boxgrove, when overtaken by Oswald.

On reaching Sir Charles and his sister, who

had reined in their horses, Oswald pulled up, and greetings were exchanged.

After favouring the young man with one of her most bewitching smiles, and allowing him to touch the tips of her gloved fingers, her ladyship addressed herself to Mrs. Sutton, of whose influence with all parties at Hazlemere she was quite cognisant, and bringing her horse as close as she could to the housekeeper, began to chat with her in the most affable and friendly manner, making all sorts of affectionate inquiries respecting May and Mrs. Radcliffe.

Mrs. Sutton knew that Sir Charles's groom had brought a letter that morning from his master to Mr. Radcliffe, and her ladyship's attentions, coupled with the haughty baronet's altered manner, led her to suspect the truth.

While Lady Richborough was thus employed, Sir Charles took Oswald in hand, and ascertained,

much to his relief, that he was merely conveying Mrs. Sutton to the Gomshall station. We say to Sir Charles's relief, for, with all a lover's doubts and trepidation, he had at first imagined that the young man and his companion were on the way to Boxgrove, charged with some sort of reply to his proposal. A little reflection would have shown him the absurdity of the supposition, but time for reflection had not been allowed him.

With unwonted courtesy, he then pressed Oswald to take luncheon with him on his way back, and the young man readily accepted the invitation. Like all who came near her, Oswald was charmed with Lady Richborough, and was delighted at the prospect of passing an hour in her society.

Hilary St. Ives formed the next topic of discourse, in which everybody took part. Of course, her ladyship had heard of the strange circum-

stances of the case—how the young man had been robbed and half murdered on Wootton Heath, and brought to Hazlemere. How was he going on? Was he still alive?

Mrs. Sutton was able to assure her that Mr. St. Ives was not only alive, but going on so well, that he would most probably come down-stairs on the morrow.

Lady Richborough was astonished. Never was anything so wonderful. He owed his life to Mrs. Sutton. But they all knew what an excellent nurse she was.

Mrs. Sutton acknowledged the compliment, and said she should not have left her patient if there had been the least danger in doing so.

Her ladyship next inquired if it was true that Mr. St. Ives was very handsome. Whereupon, Oswald immediately called out that he was the handsomest fellow he had ever seen.

On this, Sir Charles pricked up his ears, and wanted to know all about him, but no satisfactory answer could be given to his inquiries.

"Well, we are coming over to Hazlemere tomorrow, and then we shall probably see him, and learn something more," observed her ladyship. "A pleasant journey to you, dear Mrs. Sutton."

"*Dear Mrs. Sutton,*" thought the housekeeper, as she bowed adieu. "I see how it is, clearly enough. But they are mistaken, if they calculate on me."

"We shall see you at luncheon, Mr. Woodcot," said Sir Charles, waving his hand to Oswald. The young man nodded, raised his hat to Lady Richborough, and just touching Spanker with the whip, quickly disappeared.

"You will laugh at what I am going to say, Myrtille," observed Sir Charles to his sister, as they rode towards the handsome park lodge; "but

I have an unaccountable feeling that the arrival at Hazlemere of this mysterious St. Ives, at this particular juncture, bodes ill to me. I fear a rival in him—a successful rival.”

“A rival!” exclaimed her ladyship, displaying her pearly teeth, as she laughed heartily. “I know you are excessively superstitious, Charley, but I didn’t think you so bad as this. Dismiss such idle fears. Handsome as they say he is, St. Ives is not likely to cut *you* out. He has appeared on the scene in a very strange manner, I allow; but he will very soon make his exit. You have far more reason to fear rivalry from Oswald Woodcot. He is in love with his fair cousin, that’s certain. But, as I have told you, I don’t think he has made the slightest impression upon her heart. As to St. Ives, I will undertake that she shan’t fall in love with *him*.”

Meanwhile, the dog-cart pursued its way.

Having now recovered in some degree from his depression, Oswald unbosomed himself to his companion, confessing that he had shown his mother's letter to Mrs. Radcliffe and May. Mrs. Sutton looked grave, and told him he had pursued an exceedingly injudicious course, and need not be surprised at the result, adding that it would be very difficult to repair the error he had committed. While blaming his imprudence, she promised him her best assistance to set matters right; and the promise raised the poor down-hearted fellow's hopes.

Mrs. Sutton was secretly much vexed on learning that old Mr. Thornton was coming to Hazlemere next day, as his visit threatened to embarrass her plans. But she took care not to let her annoyance appear.

They reached the station just ten minutes before the arrival of the Guildford train. Oswald

would have waited to see Mrs. Sutton off, if she would have allowed him. She told him she should not return till late, as she had a good deal to do at Guildford. So he lighted a cigar, and drove off to Boxgrove, anticipating a pleasant luncheon.

When the train came up, Mrs. Sutton entered a first-class carriage.

IX.

WHY MRS. SUTTON WENT TO GUILDFORD, AND WHOM SHE
MET THERE.

A PLEASANT old town is Guildford—none pleasanter in England—and on that sunshiny spring day it wore an unusually cheerful aspect. The square tower of the ancient Norman castle, reared upon its lofty mound in the centre of the town, looked proudly, yet smilingly, on the many picturesque edifices, halls, churches, hospitals, and quaintly-gabled habitations clustered around it. Bright and beautiful looked the hills near the

town—fairest of all being St. Catherine's Hill, which now looked so lovely and inviting that a devotee might have been tempted to climb to the desecrated chapel on its brow. Fair looked the woods, wherein lies buried antique and storied Losely—fair looked the groves around Compton—fair looked the valley, through which wanders the Wey.

As Mrs. Sutton passed rapidly through the lovely valley of the Wey, and approached the picturesque old town, she could not help casting a glance at the towering keep; but otherwise, we regret to say, she was insensible to the beauties of the scene. Her mind was fully occupied with the business she had to do.

Quitting the large and bustling station, at which two important lines unite, she took her way up the High-street. It was rather crowded at the time, and many carriages passed her, but

she looked at none of them. She bought her own dresses, and most of Mrs. Radcliffe's dresses, at Guildford; but she was not going to the draper's or the milliner's now. She had extensive dealings with several other tradespeople, but she did not enter a single shop. She went on till she came to the London and County Bank.

As she entered the bank, a very respectable middle-aged man, rather bald, and wearing spectacles, who was engaged with his books at a desk at the back, happened to turn his head, and catching sight of her, he immediately quitted his occupation, and saluted her deferentially.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sutton. Glad to see you, ma'am. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" he inquired, in bland tones.

"I want to draw out a little money, Mr. Price," she replied.

"How much will you take, ma'am?" said Mr.

Price. "I will write out the draft for you, if you please."

"Thank you. Be good enough to write it for six hundred pounds."

Mr. Price looked a little surprised, but made no remark, and having written out the cheque, he passed it over the counter for her signature.

"How will you take the money, madam?" was the next inquiry.

"In five bank notes, each for one hundred. The remaining hundred in smaller notes. Stay, I should like twenty pounds in gold."

"Very good."

And the bank notes and gold being at once produced and delivered to her, she proceeded to secure them in her portmonnaie and pocket-book—for she needed both.

While she was thus employed, Mr. Price told her he had just been reading in the *Surrey Gazette*

an account of the robbery of Mr. St. Ives on Wootton Heath, and he presumed the newspaper was correct in stating that the unfortunate young gentleman had been conveyed to Hazlemere, by Mr. Radcliffe. Being informed that the statement was exact in all its particulars, Mr. Price next expressed his surprise at the great remissness of the police. What were they about? The robbers ought long since to have been captured. In this Mrs. Sutton entirely concurred. But Mr. Price did not stop here. He next ventured to observe—and he made the remark with a peculiarly soft smile—that he thought he knew how Mrs. Sutton intended to invest her money. Mr. Malham had been at the bank the other day, and mentioned casually that a very desirable house was to be sold at Wootton for six hundred pounds—a great bargain—cheap as dirt. Mr. Price hoped she was going to buy that house.

Mrs. Sutton's smile might have signified either "yes" or "no," at the option of the observer; but she made no direct response, and bowing to Mr. Price, prepared to depart.

Just as she was going two persons entered the bank. Unmistakably military men, and probably from Aldershot camp, which, as the reader need scarcely be informed, is not very far from Guildford. The foremost of the two—a youngish man, under thirty, apparently—scarcely merits description. But his companion must not be thus passed over. He was a very distinguished-looking person indeed, fifteen years at least older than his friend, but still strikingly handsome. His aristocratic and refined demeanour did not savour of the camp, though his bronzed visage, marked, but not disfigured, by a large cicatrice, and grey moustache proclaimed that he had served long under an Indian or an African sun. If he had

so served, his health did not seem much impaired. His dark eye was still full of fire, and his tall thin figure perfectly erect. A dark-blue frock-coat was buttoned tightly across his chest.

Both officers removed their cigars from their lips as they entered the bank.

"Pray come in, colonel," cried Captain de Vesci, the younger of the two. "I won't keep you longer than is required to cash a cheque."

"I will wait for you as long as my cigar will keep alight," replied the colonel, laughing.

That voice!—that well-known voice! which she had not heard for many, many years, and never expected to hear again, thrilled through Mrs. Sutton's frame, and suspended for the moment the action of her heart, causing such evident emotion that she well-nigh sank to the ground.

All the colour fled from her cheeks. Even her lips became white; and Mr. Price, noticing her

haggard looks, thought she must have been taken suddenly ill, and felt half inclined to spring across the counter to her assistance.

She raised her eyes towards the colonel, regarding him as steadfastly as she dared. Yes, it was he! But little changed—despite his grey hair and the honourable scar upon his cheek. She would have known him anywhere, and under any circumstances.

Did he know her? He stared hard at her—struck by the likeness to a long-forgotten and once dear face. But how should he know her? He believed—firmly believed—that she whom he had loved in years long gone by was dead. Nevertheless, this strange likeness to the lost one greatly startled him.

Mustering all her courage—and she had need of it—Mrs. Sutton passed him as firmly as she could. Her dress brushed him slightly as she

went by, though he moved out of her way. How she sustained herself at that trying moment she could scarcely tell.

The colonel's curiosity being excited, he stepped to the counter, and addressing Mr. Price said,

"Can you oblige me, sir, with the name of the lady who has just gone out?"

"Mrs. Sutton," was the laconic reply.

"Good God! what a strong likeness!" mentally ejaculated the colonel, too much disturbed to ask any further questions.

Mrs. Sutton felt so extremely faint, that she was obliged to enter a chemist's shop and procure some sal-volatile. The stimulant presently revived her, but she was still seated in the shop when the colonel and Captain de Vesci passed the door. Neither of them noticed her. They were talking loudly, and she distinctly heard the colonel observe to his friend,

"I wonder where the deuce that woman has gone to!" a remark that elicited a laugh from the captain.

Waiting till they were gone, she proceeded to her milliner's, whose shop was close at hand, and purchased one of those thick black veils which are as effectual a disguise as a loo-mask used to be to our great-grandmothers. Shrouded by this veil she felt more easy, and repaired to the White Hart, where, being well known, she was at once ushered to a private room up-stairs by the landlady, who seemed very glad to see her. She ordered a little luncheon, and at the same time asked for writing materials.

Left to herself, and having in some degree regained her composure, she strove to reflect on the extraordinary events that had recently taken place. The last occurrence seemed to her the strangest of all, and quite confounded her, up-

setting all her schemes, and filling her with uneasiness.

She had every reason to suppose the colonel was in India, and could not comprehend what had brought him back. He could only have just returned, for she was certain she should have heard of his arrival from Mrs. Radcliffe if any mention had been made of it in the public journals. Yet he *had* returned. She had heard his voice—had seen him. Here he was—on the spot.

How was this unlooked-for danger to be guarded against? A few days might possibly elapse before Mrs. Radcliffe heard of his return—but she was sure to hear of it ere long—in all probability from himself. Nothing more certain than he would be invited to Hazlemere. Equally certain that he would come.

Distraction was in the thought. Fate seemed

at work. The perepeties of the dark drama in which she enacted the principal and not wholly guiltless part might be at hand.

From these meditations she was roused by the waiter, who placed writing materials on a small table beside her, and then proceeded to lay a cover for luncheon.

Her plans were now so disconcerted that she felt inclined to abandon her task; but at last she resolved to bid defiance to fate, and go on.

After tracing a few lines on a sheet of paper in bold, masculine characters, totally unlike her usual handwriting, she enclosed the bank-notes of large amount which she had just received, and secured the letter in an envelope, which she directed in the same bold hand.

She had just completed her task, when the waiter informed her that luncheon was ready, and asked if he should send her letter to the

post. She thanked him, but declined, and put the letter in her bag.

She ate very little luncheon, but drank a glass of sherry, as she still felt rather faint, and then ringing the bell, paid her bill and prepared to depart.

Voices in the entrance-hall beneath arrested her on the stairs. The colonel and De Vesci were there, lighting their cigars before going out. A narrow escape. A moment sooner, and she must have come upon them.

As soon as the coast was clear she descended, said a few civil words to the hostess, who was all smiles and politeness, and begged her respectful duty to Mrs. Radcliffe, and then proceeded to the station.

Not with the intention of returning to Gomshall, though. Her day's work was not yet done. She had another and a longer journey to perform.

X.

COLONEL DELACOMBE.

SHE took a ticket by the South-Western Railway to London, and remained in the ladies' waiting-room till the train from Godalming came up. Then selecting a first-class carriage, which was nearly full, she got into it.

Till this moment she had dreaded another encounter with the colonel, but she now felt secure. But just when the train was about to start the door opened, and the very person she sought to

avoid got in, and took the only vacant seat, which happened to be opposite her own.

Captain de Vesci, who had accompanied him to the door, muttered a word at parting, which caused the colonel to glance inquisitively at his vis-à-vis.

Mrs. Sutton's features were completely masked by her veil. Her eyes only could be distinguished, and she shrank back in her seat as far as she could.

Notwithstanding this, the colonel lost no time in addressing her. Assuming a most respectful manner, he observed that he fancied he must have seen her at the bank. No answer. He ventured to make the inquiry, because he had been struck by her extraordinary resemblance to a lady, whom he had known very intimately in former years. Under such circumstances she would excuse him. A slight inclination of the head,

but no further response. He next spoke of Guildford and Abbot's Hospital, which he had just visited — a very curious place — uncommonly curious. She had no interest whatever in Guildford, or in Abbot's Hospital. Finding all his attempts futile to engage her in conversation, he was compelled to desist.

He opened a newspaper, and while feigning to be occupied with it, stole an occasional glance at her. She felt he was watching her, but though trembling inwardly, did not betray the slightest emotion.

After awhile he changed his tactics, and began to converse with an elderly gentleman next him, and she fancied some parts of his discourse were intended for her ear. He informed this gentleman, who proved to be the rector of Woking, that he had just returned from India, and had landed at Southampton in the *Poonah*. He had since been

at Aldershot, where his old regiment was stationed. He had been so long in India that everything appeared strange to him. Most of his friends were dead, and the few who were left must have forgotten him. As he made the latter remark, he glanced at Mrs. Sutton; but though listening attentively, she did not appear to notice what he said.

The rector and his son got out at Woking, and the colonel had again recourse to his newspaper. At Weybridge, the two other persons quitted the train, and he was left alone with the mysterious lady. Now he was determined to have an answer from her.

Rather abruptly, and in a somewhat different tone from that which he had previously adopted, he asked if she had ever been in India. She answered faintly, "Never."

"Where can we have met then?" he cried.

"That we *have* met before to-day I am certain. If not in India, it must have been in this country, upwards of twenty years ago. I have only had a momentary glimpse of your features, madam, but they recalled so vividly the face of one very dear to me, that if she were not lost to me for ever, I should have believed you were she herself. Even now I cannot wholly divest myself of the idea——"

"No more of this, I beseech you, sir," interrupted Mrs. Sutton. "I cannot—will not—listen to it. You are quite mistaken in me. We have never met before."

"By Heaven! the very voice!" cried the colonel. "If you have a spark of pity in your composition, madam, you will raise your veil."

But she showed no signs of compliance, though the request was still more passionately urged.

"Why do you refuse me?" he cried. "My conduct may appear impertinent, but, on my soul! I am influenced by no idle curiosity or improper motive. Doubts have been created in my mind that must be set at rest."

"I shall think you crazed if you continue in this strain, sir," she rejoined. "If I happen to resemble some one you have known, that is no reason why I should be subjected to annoyance. You are a perfect stranger to me."

"I am Seymour Delacombe. Does that name awaken no recollections in your breast?"

"None," she rejoined, firmly.

The colonel fell back in his seat, with something like a groan.

Looking up, shortly afterwards, he perceived that she had turned aside, and was hastily removing a handkerchief from her eyes.

"By Heaven! she is weeping," he mentally

exclaimed. And his doubts being again roused by the discovery, he added, "I see you are moved, madam. I assure you it has not been my wish to distress or offend you. Far from it. I owe you an explanation of my conduct, and if you will permit me, I will give you such particulars of my history as relate to the unhappy lady, whose loss I deplore, and whom you so strangely resemble in feature, voice, and person."

"Pray spare me the recital, sir," she rejoined, with freezing coldness. "Doubtless the history is curious, but it can have no interest for me. I have no desire to be made the depository of your secrets."

"I fear I have really offended you, madam—but it has been most inadvertently. I beg you to accept my excuses."

"I cannot accept them, sir. Either you or I must descend at the next station."

"I will relieve you of my society," he rejoined, haughtily. "It will not put me to much inconvenience to obey you, since I have no luggage with me. My trunks have been sent on to London. I deem it right to acquaint you that I learnt your name at the Guildford bank—your name, and nothing more," he added, observing her start.

"If we ever meet again, it must be as entire strangers," she cried, in an agitated voice. "Promise me this, and we part friends."

"I promise it."

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

"Enough."

On reaching Kingston, Colonel Delacombe bade her a ceremonious adieu. His tall, thin figure could be seen on the platform as the train departed.

He was vexed at being thus defeated, but he promised himself speedy revenge.

Mrs. Sutton pursued her journey in comparative tranquillity, and reached Waterloo-bridge Station without further adventure.

XI.

MR. PAGE THORNTON.

TAKING a cab, she drove at once to the General Post Office at Charing-cross, and registered the letter, in which she had enclosed the bank-notes at Guildford. She smiled with satisfaction when this was done.

She next told the cabman, who had waited for her, to proceed to Silver's, in Cornhill, and there dismissed him. At this large establishment, where every kind of habiliment, of every size and quality, can be had, she purchased articles

of wearing apparel of the best description, sufficient to constitute a complete outfit, stating they were required by a young gentleman who was going out to India immediately. As she was provided with the requisite measure, there was no difficulty in the matter. Messrs. Silver supplied her with all she wanted. Having paid the bill, which was made out to Hilary St. Ives, Esq., she desired that it might be forwarded to him with the goods, to the address given. Messrs. Silver promised that her directions should be carefully attended to, and she departed.

This affair occupied some time, for she had been solicitous to choose such articles as would best suit Hilary, and she pleased herself with the idea of how much surprised he would be when he received the packages. Her business was now ended, and her mind more easy. It would have been quite easy, if she had not

encountered Colonel Delacombe. But she had his promise not to molest her, and she thought she could prevent him from coming to Hazlemere, at least, for the present.

Mrs. Sutton was very rarely in London, and still more rarely in the city, but, being there, she thought she might as well look about her.

Countryfolk are always attracted by shops, and she stopped to gaze at several richly-garnished windows as she passed along Cornhill. At last, she entered a jeweller's for the purpose of purchasing a birthday gift for May, and had just chosen a simple, pretty ring, set with an emerald, when an elderly gentleman came in, and, on beholding her, uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Unluckily, her veil was raised at the moment, and she could not let it fall.

A very gentlemanlike-looking old gentleman. About seventy—perhaps a trifle more—but look-

ing very hearty for his years. His features had a sardonic expression, not devoid of humour, which lurked about his mouth, and his keen searching grey eyes, peering from under bushy brows, betokened great shrewdness. His round, red cheeks were scrupulously shaven. His attire was extremely neat; but it was the neatness of the old school, not of the new. He wore a low-crowned hat turned up at the sides, a chocolate-coloured coat with a velvet collar, and a white cravat. Though the day was particularly fine, he was armed with an umbrella.

To her infinite dismay, Mrs. Sutton recognised her mistress's father, old Mr. Page Thornton, of Chester.

"God bless me! Mrs. Sutton," he exclaimed. "Who would have thought of seeing you! How are you? And how are they all at Hazlemere?"

"All quite well, thank you, Mr. Thornton. I

needn't ask how you are, sir. You are looking uncommonly well."

"Thankee—yes—quite as well as an old fellow can expect to be. But what are you doing in town, madam?"

Mr. Thornton was very inquisitive.

"Why, to tell you the truth, sir, I wanted to buy a little present for Miss May—to-morrow is her birthday, as you are aware—and not being able to meet with anything I liked at Guildford, I ran up to town."

"Exactly my own errand. I have come here to buy May a birthday present. Odd, ain't it? What have you bought, ma'am?"

Mrs. Sutton showed him the emerald ring.

"Ah! very pretty! But I must choose something else. Give me the benefit of your taste ma'am. You know what May would like."

"Anything from her grandpapa will please her,

air. But I see no reason why you should not give her a ring as well as myself."

"None on earth—ha! ha! I will. Girls load their fingers with rings now-a-days. Can't have too many—ha! ha! Help me to choose one."

On this hint a glittering assortment of jewelry was placed before him, from which, with Mrs. Sutton's aid, he selected a diamond locket, a diamond star, a lovely sapphire ring, the prettiest little watch and chain imaginable, with some other ornaments, costing altogether nearly two hundred pounds, which he very cheerfully paid.

He then gave directions that his grand-daughter's name with the date, 1st May, 186—, should be engraved inside the watch.

The jeweller promised that this should be done in the course of a few hours, and asked where he should send the things.

"Pack them up carefully in a little box, and

send them to me—Mr. Page Thornton—at the Langham Hotel, Portland-place. The box must be delivered into my own hands. I shall be at dinner at half-past seven.”

The jeweller promised faithfully that the box should be brought to him at the Langham, at the hour appointed.

“A word with you, ma’am,” said the old gentleman, taking Mrs. Sutton aside. “I’m coming to Hazlemere to-morrow. But don’t mention it. Don’t say you’ve seen me.”

“I won’t even say that I’ve been in town, sir.”

“Ah! I see,” he cried, with a knowing look. “Run up on the sly, eh? Never mind, I won’t peach. But tell me! how does my grandson Oswald get on? In favour with his fair cousin, eh? You’re in their secrets, I’ll be sworn, Sutton.”

“Indeed, I am not, sir. Mr. Oswald and Miss

May are constantly together—that's all I know. But I think—mind, I only think—my young lady has had an offer this very morning from Sir Charles Ilminster."

"Sir Charles Ilminster of Boxgrove! Zounds! she must accept *him*."

"*Must* accept him, Mr. Thornton! You know very little of your grand-daughter, sir, to say so."

"Well, I mean she *ought* to accept him. Oswald must be thrown over. Mrs. Woodcot will be wofully disappointed, but that can't be helped. We must find some one else for the poor lad. Sir Charles has a sister—a widow—young and very handsome, I am told. *She* might do. I'll talk it over with Mrs. Radcliffe. But I'm keeping you here, ma'am. Where are you going, if it's fair to ask?"

Mrs. Sutton replied that she was going to the Cannon-street Station, whereupon he offered to

escort her thither, and they left the shop together. As yet, Mrs. Sutton had said nothing respecting Hilary St. Ives; but as they walked along in the direction of Cannon-street—after a little debate with herself as to the prudence of alluding to him—she told the old gentleman of the guest they had got at Hazlemere, and under what strange circumstances he had been brought there.

Mr. Thornton listened to her narration with surprise and some displeasure; but when he learnt that Mrs. Radcliffe had invited Hilary to remain a few days to recruit, he became redder than ever in the face.

“Why ask him to stay?” he exclaimed, angrily. “Because Mr. Radcliffe chose to play the Good Samaritan, why should she play the fool? Who is he? Some wretched adventurer—a strolling player, I’ll be bound.”

Mrs. Sutton strove to appease him, but he continued grumbling all the way till they reached the gates of the station.

While thanking him for his escort, Mrs. Sutton thought it well to caution him that he must know nothing about Mr. St. Ives on his arrival at Hazlemere on the morrow.

Mr. Thornton promised to be careful, and bidding her adieu, got into a hansom-cab and drove to the Langham Hotel.

As he was whirled rapidly through the crowded streets, he could not help thinking about Mrs. Sutton. "A very superior woman, indeed," he said to himself, "quite a lady. Upon my soul I can't make her out."

As he entered the large coffee-room of the Langham, he observed a gentleman seated at one of the tables, whose striking appearance at once attracted his attention. Feeling certain he

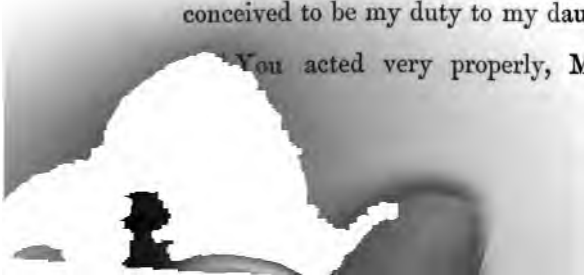
knew the face, he applied to a waiter, and learnt that the gentleman was the very person he supposed—Colonel Delacombe. He at once marched towards him, and the colonel, looking up from his newspaper as he advanced, after a moment's hesitation recognised him, and arose. Explanations ensued, and they shook hands very cordially together. The meeting was as agreeable as unexpected,—particularly agreeable to the colonel, who immediately began to make inquiries about Mrs. Radcliffe, and appeared enchanted with the good accounts given him of her by the old gentleman. Mr. Thornton, who was very proud of his daughter, assured him she was looking just as well as ever, which the colonel was quite ready to believe. Then the old gentleman began to talk about his grand-daughter, and expatiated on her beauty, but the gallant colonel would not admit that she could be so beautiful as her mother.

"Most people think May far better-looking than her mother," cried Mr. Thornton, "but I own——"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the colonel. "Esther Thornton—pardon me for calling her by that name!—was the most charming creature ever beheld. Her daughter may equal her, but cannot possibly surpass her. I am not going to be sentimental. Sentiment is not in my line now. But I assure you I was a long time in getting over that cruel disappointment. I suffered more from it than from any bodily wound, and I have received a good many."

"I can easily believe it, colonel. I know how much you were attached to Esther. I was obliged to act harshly in breaking off that engagement—contrary to my own feelings—but I did what I conceived to be my duty to my daughter."

"You acted very properly, Mr. Thornton—"



very wisely. Mr. Radcliffe has made her a devilish deal better husband than I should have done."

"Radcliffe has certainly made her an excellent husband, and perhaps all is for the best. She might have been a great anxiety to you. You are aware she has had very poor health for years, and is now a confirmed invalid—when I say an invalid, I mean that she thinks herself one, and lives like one. I call her a *malade imaginaire*. And so she is; for she looks as well as ever, as I have just told you. Run down to Hazlemere when you have a few days to spare. Esther will be delighted to see you, and so will Radcliffe—he is a deuced good fellow, and not the least bit jealous—and you will make the acquaintance of my pretty little May. I am going there to-morrow, and will tell them I have seen you."

"You will do me a great kindness, Mr. Thorn-

ton. I intended to drop Mrs. Radcliffe a line to inform her of my return, which, as I have explained, was much sooner than I anticipated, but you will say all that for me."

They then had some further friendly chat, and as the colonel had no engagement, they agreed to dine together at seven o'clock. Mr. Thornton was rather fond of good cheer, and like Baron de Brisse, piqued himself upon his skill in arranging a menu.

The colonel left the matter entirely to him, and having ordered what he hoped would turn out to be a nice little dinner, he proposed a short promenade, and they went forth together, strolling down Bond-street and St. James's-street, looking in at the Carlton, to which club Mr. Thornton belonged, and proceeding to the Senior United Service Club, of which the colonel was a member, and where he announced his return.

During their walk, Colonel Delacombe met several acquaintances, all of whom seemed as much surprised as delighted to see him. The colonel was very chatty and agreeable. If his object was to ingratiate himself with the old gentleman, he succeeded to a marvel.

The dinner was first rate—at least the colonel said so. He had not eaten such a good dinner since the last time he dined with Mr. Thornton, he wouldn't say how many years ago. The old gentleman was much flattered. They managed to get through a bottle of perfectly-iced Clicquot, with a slight admixture of fine old sherry, and had just begun to test the merits of a bottle of Laffitte, of a famous vintage, which was placed upon the table when the cloth was drawn, when the waiter introduced a young man charged with a small box, which he said he was ordered to deliver into Mr. Thornton's own hands. The old

gentleman said it was all right, and the messenger withdrew.

After explaining what the box contained, Mr. Thornton begged the colonel to excuse him for a moment while he locked it up.

On his return he remarked, "Apropos of that box of trinkets, I must relate an odd circumstance that occurred to me to-day. Chancing to be in Cornhill, quite by accident, I entered a jeweller's shop, with the design of purchasing a birthday gift for May, when whom should I stumble upon but my daughter's housekeeper, Mrs. Sutton. She had come there on the same errand as myself. Odd, wasn't it?"

"Very odd," remarked the colonel. "Did you say Mrs. Sutton?"

"Yes, that's the housekeeper's name, and a very superior person she is—not like a housekeeper at all—quite a lady, in fact. It appears

that she went over to Guildford this morning."

"To Guildford!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Yes; and not finding exactly what she wanted for May, she came on to town, little dreaming she would meet *me*."

"And little dreaming that *I* should hear of her, and learn all about her," thought the colonel, greatly surprised.

Filling a bumper, he said, "Let us devote this glass to Mrs. Radcliffe. To-morrow you will drink your grand-daughter's health. To-day let us drink her mother's."

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Mr. Thornton.

Reason was done to the toast.

Cheered by the generous wine, the old gentleman remarked with a droll look, "I've a proposition to make to you, colonel, which I hope you

may find agreeable. Run down with me to Hazlemere to-morrow, and surprise Mrs. Radcliffe, ha! ha!"

"Are you serious, sir?" asked the colonel. "Or is this a jest? If you are in earnest, I'm more than half inclined to take you at your word. But all responsibility must rest with yourself."

"I'll ensure you a hearty welcome from Radcliffe; that's all you need trouble yourself about. Madame will certainly be charmed to see you. Gad, it will be a surprise to *her*."

"And to Mrs. Sutton as well," thought the colonel.

Nothing could have pleased the colonel better, and he was quite as much tickled by the jest as the old gentleman was. Indeed, there was more in it to him than to Mr. Thornton.

Settled that they were to start for Hazlemere at a tolerably early hour in the morning.

Their bottle of claret finished, they adjourned to the smoking-room, where they continued to talk of bygone days, of old friends, and of events that had occurred during the colonel's prolonged absence.

XII.

IN WHAT MANNER MRS. SUTTON OBTAINED POSSESSION OF
THE DOCUMENTS.

ON consulting the time tables, Mrs. Sutton found there was no train that would answer her purpose before six o'clock, and having more than an hour to spare, she repaired to the refreshment-room, and partook of a slight repast.

Though quite unconscious of the danger that threatened her on the morrow, and never dreaming of the meeting that had taken place between Mr. Thornton and Colonel Delacombe, she was uneasy, and had a presentiment of coming ill.

While travelling homewards in the train, she revolved the strange events of the day, weighing the difficulties they were likely to give rise to, and which she might have to encounter.

The train was late, and it was not far from eight o'clock when she reached the Gomshall station. A fly was in waiting, for she had mentioned in the morning that she should require one on her return.

The night was clear and starlight, but, as we know, she had to pass through a district abounding in fine timber. Where the road was overshadowed by wide-branching trees, as it not unfrequently was, it was profoundly dark. The fly proceeded slowly, being drawn by a miserable horse.

A courageous woman, and possessing strong nerves, Mrs. Sutton did not feel any alarm, as she proceeded at the slow pace we have mentioned

along the somewhat lonely road. She tried to compose her mind before her re-appearance at Hazlemere, and nothing occurred to disturb her until she had passed the lodge of Boxgrove Park.

The vehicle in which she sat was crawling up an ascent at a foot pace, when two men, whose appearance she did not like—though she could scarcely distinguish them through the gloom—suddenly emerged from the side of the hedge, where they seemed to have been lurking, and addressed a few words in rather gruff tones to the driver.

Involuntarily, the thought of the gipsies, by whom Hilary had been robbed, crossed her. These might be the very men—she knew the police suspected that they were still in the neighbourhood. The idea frightened her, for she had still a considerable sum of money about her, and she hastily concealed the notes about her person, leaving

some ten or twelve sovereigns in her portemonnaie.

Her alarm, however, seemed groundless. After a few words with the driver, which, owing to her trepidation, she could not catch, the two men went on at a quick pace, and were soon lost to view.

Putting her head out of the window, she inquired of the coachman what they had said.

"They asked if I came from the Gomshall station," he replied; "and one on 'em wanted me to give him a lift as far as Blackthorn Common, but I refused, not much liking their looks."

This explanation did not altogether relieve Mrs. Sutton's uneasiness, but nothing more happened till they got to the edge of the common, when the poor jade that had brought her thus far stumbled over something on the road, and when he got on his legs again it was evident he could go no further.

Presently the coachman appeared at the window, and, touching his hat, said :

“Sorry to tell you, ma’am, that you’ll have to get out. My horse is dead lame. Accidents will happen, you knows, ma’am.”

“Yes, but this is extremely vexatious. You have brought a very bad horse, and I shan’t employ you again.”

“The horse ain’t a good un, I admit, ma’am. But it warn’t exactly his fault. He fell over a great stone that seemed left in the road o’ purpose.”

“Well, I suppose I must walk. Luckily, we’re not more than two miles from Hazlemere. Open the door, and let me out.”

“Shall I go with you across the common, ma’am ?”

“No,” she replied in a decided tone, “I can take care of myself.”

She had got about half way across the common without meeting with anything to alarm her, when fancying she heard footsteps, she turned her head, and, to her indescribable dismay, perceived the two men about a bowshot off, running fleetly and noiselessly along the turf, with the evident design of overtaking her.

On seeing them she instantly started off, though with very slight chance of escape. Terror, instead of lending her wings, as it is said to do, on fearful emergencies like the present, seemed to deprive her of all strength.

Her pursuers gained rapidly upon her, and called to her to stop, loudly and menacingly.

Finding escape impracticable, and feeling, moreover, that she should speedily drop, she turned and faced them.

By the time they came up, she had regained her breath, and something of her courage.]

"What do you want?" she cried, in as bold a tone as she could assume. "But I needn't ask. Your design is to rob me."

"No, we means you no harm, missis," replied the foremost of the two, who was no other than Reuben. "We have been on the look out for you. We saw you go to the station this morning, and managed to find out how you meant to return. We wants to have a word with you, if you please, missis," he added, doffing his cap, and speaking as civilly as he could.

"Say on then," rejoined Mrs. Sutton, who had now recovered her composure.

"Cut it short, Reuben," cried Seth Cooper, impatiently. "Ciwility's well enough in its way, but we arn't time for it just now. Come to the pint. Tell Madam Sutton plainly as 'ow we wants to make a bargain wi' her."

"What! you know my name?" she exclaimed.

"Ay, and we knows summat more nor your name, missis," rejoined Seth.

"We also know how to hold our tongues, missis," observed Reuben, more courteously.

"If you know me, I am equally aware whom I have to deal with," said Mrs. Sutton. "You are the two men who robbed and maltreated Mr. Hilary St. Ives on Wootton Heath the other night."

"Granted," replied Reuben. "We don't deny the fact. We was lucky enough to light on Mr. St. Ives t'other night. We was lucky enough to get hold of his papers, and we now counts on selling 'em to advantage."

"Werry walerable they is to you, Madam Sutton, as you'll find," remarked Seth, significantly. "Secrets is safe wi' us. But you mightn't like to trust other folk wi' 'em. We've run great risks in stayin' hereabouts—wi' the perlice at our 'eels—

chiefly on your account, and we must be compensated. Wot are we to get for the papers?"

"Have you got them with you?" she demanded.

"Ay," he rejoined. "We don't trust 'em out ov our own keeping."

"You shall have twelve sovereigns—all my purse contains," she replied.

"That's very little," said Reuben. "Them dockyments is worth hundreds to you, missis."

"Twelve suvrins!" cried Seth, scornfully. "We can't take it. Consider the risk we've run to sarve you, Madam Sutton. Be you sartin you've got no more about you?"

"A great chance that I have so much," she replied, now convinced that it was needless to offer more.

The villains held a brief consultation together, during which Mrs. Sutton watched them anxiously. To her infinite relief and satisfaction she saw they meant to comply.

Pulling out a large packet from his pouch, Seth stepped towards her, holding it in his hand.

"Here's the papers," he said; "not one on 'em a-missin', I'll take my Bible oath on it."

"And here's my purse," she replied, giving it to him.

"Count the money, Reuben," cried Seth, handing the purse to him.

"A dozen suvrins, all right," said Reuben.

"Then take the papers, missis," cried Seth, delivering the packet to her, "and good luck go wi' 'em. You've got the best o' the bargain."

"And now we'll wish you good night, Madam Sutton," said Reuben. "You'll hear no more of us. Long afore daybreak we shall be miles away from Wootton."

And they flew with the swiftness of hunted deer across the common.

"Now, indeed, I feel secure," cried Mrs. Sutton, pressing the packet exultingly to her breast.

Half an hour afterwards she arrived at Hazlemere, pale and exhausted. Naturally, her first business was to lock up the precious packet, reserving its examination for another season.

After giving such orders as were necessary, she repaired to Hilary's room, and was glad to find that still further improvement had taken place in him since morning. He was in very good spirits, and looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to the morrow.

She sat with him for some little time, and then proceeded to the boudoir, where she had a long conversation with her mistress.

But she did not tell her why she went to Guildford, nor whom she had seen there. Neither did she explain what had subsequently befallen her.

XIII.

MAY'S BIRTHDAY.

VERY pleasant to be nineteen, as many of my fair readers must have experienced. Especially pleasant to a lovely girl full of health and spirit—no cloud on her past existence, and a bright future before her.

She who could now count nineteen springs arose betimes on that bright auspicious morn—for everything seemed to smile on her—and arraying herself in white, descended to the house-

keeper's room to bid her good morrow, before going out into the garden.

A very nice little parlour indeed. Tastefully furnished, and well provided with cupboards and store-closets.

Mrs. Sutton was by herself, busily occupied in preparations for the day, but she discontinued her task as May came in, and embracing her with more than her usual warmth, offered her every good wish proper to the occasion.

Rarely was the housekeeper so demonstrative. Gazing fondly in May's fair face, and still holding her in her arms, she exclaimed,

"How well you are looking on your birthday, dear. Ah!" she added, vainly trying to repress a sigh, "I wish I had a heart as light as yours. I once had—though not at nineteen. My morn of life was soon overcast. All good angels guard you, dear! May you long continue as blithe and free from care as you are now!"

May was sensibly moved by the housekeeper's evident emotion, but Mrs. Sutton speedily recovered her usual serenity.

"I have a little present for you, dear," she said. "It is of slight value, but I hope you will accept it as a token of your old nurse's affection. Wear this for my sake."

And she gave her the emerald ring.

Thanking her with effusion, May told her, as she put the ring on her taper finger, that nothing could have pleased her better than the gift, adding that she would always wear it.

"Always, dear?"

"Always," replied May, earnestly. "And now, dear Sutton," she continued, taking a chair, "I have something to say to you."

First closing the door, the housekeeper sat down beside her, putting on a look calculated to invite confidence.

She understood at once the nature of the communication about to be made to her, when May mentioned—not without a blush—that Lady Richborough and Sir Charles Ilminster were coming over to Hazlemere in the course of the morning.

“Merely to offer you compliments and good wishes, I presume?” observed Mrs. Sutton.

“Not exactly. I dare say they are quite ignorant that it is my birthday.”

“Perhaps, then, Sir Charles may be coming for an answer to a certain letter which he sent yesterday.” And she added, with a smile, “A little bird has told me all about it, you see, dear.”

“That little bird tells you everything, Sutton.”

“Your mamma told me this, because she knows how much I am interested in all that concerns you, dear. Well, what is the answer to be? Have you made up your mind?”

“Not yet,” replied May, shaking her head.

"That is why I desire to consult you. I know you will give me good advice."

"That I will, darling—the best in my power. The offer requires consideration."

"Mamma declares it requires *no* consideration. I am not of her opinion."

"Nor I. But I mean that such an offer ought not to be hastily rejected. Would you not like to be Lady Ilminster?"

"A title does not dazzle me, Sutton."

"But Sir Charles has many recommendations besides his high position. He is a perfect gentleman—distinguished in appearance and manner. I saw him yesterday, and thought so. What is your objection to him?" she asked, regarding her fixedly.

"I have really no objection to make to him—except that he does not interest me. Frankly, Sutton, I do not think I could ever love him."

Much relieved by this avowal, but carefully dissembling her satisfaction, the housekeeper rejoined, "If such is your firm determination, dear, you will do well to decline Sir Charles's offer. Otherwise, you will run the risk of entailing unhappiness on yourself and on him. Mutual affection I hold to be an indispensable ingredient in married life."

"You are right, Sutton," observed May, completely duped by her artful counsellor. "The risk is unnecessary, since I am perfectly happy as I am."

"Well, I cannot but applaud your determination, though I own I am surprised at it. Rank has generally an irresistible attraction to our sex. And now, since Sir Charles is disposed of, may I venture to say a word in favour of some one else—of one who professes to love you dearly?"

"I guess what is coming," cried May, smiling.
"But proceed."

"Your cousin Oswald unbosomed himself to me as we drove to the station, and told me what you had said to him. But I fancied on second thoughts you might change your mind. May I console the poor young gentleman? May I give him a hope?"

May shook her head.

"He had his final answer yesterday," she remarked.

"Then I am to understand that your heart is quite disengaged? Look me in the face, and tell me so—if you can."

"I can, Sutton. 'My heart is my own,' as the song says," cried May, fixing her clear truthful eyes upon her as she spoke. "Take this assurance also: I will never wed any man unless I love him."

Mrs. Sutton smiled approval, and reflected for a moment. A favourable opportunity seemed to have occurred for bringing up Hilary St. Ives, and she determined not to let it slip.

Somewhat changing her manner, she remarked, "Laugh, if you please, at what I am going to say to you, dear—laugh, but listen. While I was nursing the young gentleman who has been so strangely placed under my care, a singular idea occurred to me, and I have not been able to divest myself of it since. Possibly his good looks—he is extremely good-looking, dear—may have prompted the notion. At any rate, it came into my head."

Pleased to find her listener's curiosity excited, she went on, after a well-calculated pause :

"Fate, I thought to myself, must have brought him here for a special purpose. What can the purpose be ? The answer came immediately. He must be destined for May."

Great was the young lady's surprise. Throwing herself back in her chair, she laughed aloud. "For *me!*" she exclaimed. "Did you say for *me*, Sutton?"

"For you, dear," replied the housekeeper, in no way disconcerted. "Such was the idea that forced itself upon me. There *is* such a thing as destiny."

"There may be," replied May, still laughing. "But mine is not mixed up with that of Mr. Hilary St. Ives."

With affected gravity, though she could scarcely maintain a serious countenance, she then added, "Are you quite sure, Sutton, that the whole affair is not a contrivance of your own to get this young man into the house? It looks very, very suspicious."

"*I* bring him here!" ejaculated the housekeeper, petrified by the accusation. "What next? If there has been a plot, your papa and Mr.

Oswald have been the chief actors in it, and I don't think you will suspect *them*."

"Neither do I suspect *you*, you dear, kind, absurd creature. Don't you perceive I was only jesting? You deserve to be laughed at for your folly. Mamma is just as silly. She raves about this young man's good looks. He seems to have turned both your foolish heads. But don't say a word more in his praise I beg of you, or I shall positively dislike him, and I don't desire to do that. By-the-by, is he coming down to breakfast?"

"I believe so. I have heard nothing to the contrary. He wished to be called early, and Boston has gone up to his room some time ago."

"That reminds me you will have to change his room to-day, since grandpapa is coming."

"Yes, I mean to give him the little bachelor's room, next to Mr. Oswald's. It looks upon the

garden, and will suit him to a T. Perhaps you will assert next that I have invited him to stay, in pursuance of my deeply-laid scheme."

"No, I won't, dear Sutton, for I am aware it was mamma who asked him. Forgive me for teasing you. You must not be cross with your little pet on her birthday. Come with me to the garden."

"Not just now," replied the housekeeper, rising, as if with the intention of resuming her work. "I've a great deal to do."

"Nay, you shall come, or I shall think you really angry. I'll gather you the prettiest nosegay possible in return for the ring."

Mrs. Sutton yielded. Indeed, she required very little persuasion. So they went into the garden together.

The gardens and grounds at Hazlemere were tolerably large—large enough, at all events, to

require the attention of three or four gardeners, besides extra hands. Laid out in the landscape style by a disciple of Payne Knight, they were extremely well kept, for Mr. Radcliffe spared no expense upon his place. He had plenty of "glass," and his head-gardener, Kenneth M'Donald, a Scotsman, as his name imported, had won no end of prizes for grapes and pineapples. Magnificent were the show peaches and nectarines—superb the strawberries grown by Kenneth M'Donald, gardener to Theobald Radcliffe, Esq., of Hazlemere. Our business, however, is not with the produce of the gardens, but with the gardens themselves, of which we must attempt to give the reader some slight notion.

A broad terrace, or rather platform, artificially raised several feet above the lawn, extended in front of the house, and led on past arabesque parterres, embroidered with box, and filled with

flowers and dwarf flowering shrubs, towards an inclosure latticed with wire, and appropriated to gold and silver pheasants and ring-doves. Further on were the greenhouse and hothouses. A splendid wistaria, a couple of fine magnolias—one of which, a "*conspicua*," was in full flower—with roses and jasmines, covered the walls near the terrace.

A flight of stone steps led down to another broad gravel walk which followed the course of the terrace, and opened upon the smooth-shaven lawn, or rather series of lawns. Near the house the ground was level, but further on it sloped gently down to a small but well-timbered park, from which it was only divided by iron hurdles. The lawns were interspersed with scattered trees, clumps of rhododendrons, which grew to great size, and other early flowering shrubs, with countless beds of roses. Pleasant walks led to pleasant

spots, disclosing fresh beauties at every turn—a summer-house half hidden in a bosquet—a rustic bench beneath a spreading tree. Nothing was neglected. A large green patch of smoothest turf, flat as a billiard-table, served the double purpose of a bowling-green and a ground for croquet. A long shady walk brought you to the coppices skirting the park. Another walk led through the intricacies of a thicket to a sequestered glen, abounding in heaths, ferns, and alpine plants, and where an abundant spring, gushing forth amid the rocks, immediately formed a rivulet. At the end of the ravine was the miniature lake, whence Mr. Radcliffe's residence derived its name.

Returning from this sequestered glen to the sunshiny terrace from which we have strayed, we shall find, on casting our eyes around, that it commands a diversified country, wild and heathy in parts, but generally well cultivated, covered for

the most part with timber, and embellished by many a stately mansion. On the left the prospect is bounded by the North Downs—on the right by a lower range of chalk hills.

But let us confine ourselves to Hazlemere. We need not search elsewhere for beauty. It lies before us. Gardens and pleasure grounds alike are charming, and could not be seen in greater perfection than on this enchanting May morning, when the smooth lawns are flooded with sunshine, when the air is filled with the perfume of flowers, and the groves are vocal with melody. The blackbird and the speckled thrush venture near us, plainly manifesting by their tameness how kindly treated they are by the fair young mistress of Hazlemere, whose natal day we celebrate. Poets—the greatest of poets—have sung the delights of May Day morn; but Milton himself never hymned a May morn more exquisite.

On issuing forth upon the terrace, May and her companion stood still to inhale the balmy odours arising from the flower-beds, and listen to the choristers in the groves. Both were enraptured by the beauty of the day. May felt joyous as the morn itself ; and even Mrs. Sutton, exhilarated by the genial influences, was able for the moment to cast off her cares.

“Look, Sutton, here come my pretty pets to bid me good morrow,” cried May, as a pair of blackbirds ran along the lawn as if to greet her.

Other birds followed, and after properly rewarding the attentions of her feathered favourites, May proceeded to gather the promised nosegay for the housekeeper. They then descended to the lawn, and took their way towards some distant parterres, where M'Donald and another gardener were engaged in filling a basket with flowers for the decoration of the breakfast-table. The lovely queen of the fête was attended in her march

across the velvet turf by her faithful blackbirds and thrushes. M'Donald, a good-looking man with a fiery-red beard, took off his cap as she approached, and in his racy Doric, and with a heartiness that bespoke sincerity, offered her his best wishes on the occasion. The basket being nearly full, he asked if he should take it to the house. Mrs. Sutton bade him do so, giving him at the same time some directions as to the arrangement of the flowers. She also reminded him that he and the under-gardener were expected at dinner in the servants' hall, where they would have an opportunity of drinking the health of their young mistress.

Just as the gardener was departing, May inquired if he had seen her cousin, and M'Donald rejoined that Mr. Oswald had been there not ten minutes ago, but had gone down towards the lake to smoke a cigar, and give Neptune a swim.

M'Donald and his man then took the basket

and proceeded towards the house, while May and the housekeeper walked on in the opposite direction.

They were chatting together near a rose-bed, when May chanced to turn her head, and perceived M'Donald coming back. He was supporting a tall young man, who walked rather feebly, and who certainly could not have got so far without the aid of the gardener's strong arm.

In this young man she had no difficulty in recognising Hilary St. Ives.

XIV.

HILARY'S STORY.

HILARY, it appeared, had seen them from his chamber window, which commanded the terrace and lawn, and unable to resist the impulse that prompted him to join them, hastily completed his toilet, and made his way to the garden. When he gained the terrace they were gone, but perceiving them at a distance, he was moving slowly in that direction, when M'Donald came up, and noting his debility, at once offered him his arm.

Naturally, the gardener was aware of the circumstances under which Hilary had been brought to the house, and as they walked along he expressed his satisfaction at the young man's recovery. He also thought it right to communicate the fact that it was Miss May's birthday, adding, "She is the bonniest young leddy in all England, and as gude and kind-haired as she is bonnie."

"Why, I declare, there is Mr. St. Ives," cried May, on seeing him.

"Yes, 'tis he, sure enough," rejoined the housekeeper. And though secretly pleased, she added, "How very foolish of him to venture forth in this way. I must scold him. He quite miscalculates his strength."

"Yes, he seems very feeble. Go to him, Sutton."

The housekeeper immediately hurried forward, while May followed more leisurely.

As Mrs. Sutton came up, M'Donald felt that his services were no longer needed, and, touching his cap, he retired.

The housekeeper blamed her patient for coming out without her permission, but her looks belied her words, and showed she was not much displeased.

"I merely wished to pay my respects to Miss Radcliffe," observed Hilary, in a deprecatory tone. "May I beg you to present me to her?"

Mrs. Sutton smiled graciously, and, giving him her arm, led him towards the young lady, who had stopped at a short distance from them.

As they slowly advanced, May had an opportunity of scrutinising the young man's appearance, and she mentally admitted that her mother's and Mrs. Sutton's praises of his good looks were not undeserved. He was still very pale, and evidently suffering from the effects of the injuries he had

received, but this expression was calculated to excite sympathy.

On his part, Hilary experienced sensations hitherto unknown to him. Dazzled by May's beauty, he scarcely dared to raise his eyes towards her, and trembled at the thought of entering into her presence. His emotion became so great that he was obliged to halt for a moment, and May, attributing the pause to increased debility, stepped quickly forward, and in a few kind and sympathetic words expressed her concern.

Her accents vibrated through Hilary's frame, and made the blood rush to his heart, tending to heighten his confusion; but her gentle looks soon reassured him. Thanking her for the interest she displayed in his condition, he assured her he was better, and forced a smile to corroborate his words. Mrs. Sutton, who watched them both narrowly, then introduced him to the young lady,

and the ice being now fairly broken, he quickly recovered his self-possession, and was able to converse in a manner that left the anxious house-keeper no doubt as to the impression he was likely to produce. Decidedly May was pleased with his manner. Nor did the interest with which he had at first inspired her at all decrease on further acquaintance with him. The few words in which he besought her to accept his best wishes were appropriate and earnest, and he was lavish in his expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness and consideration shown him since his arrival at Hazlemere.

After stating that the misadventure that had occurred to him, combined with the loss of his papers, had upset all his plans, he added, with some little gallantry, that he could not regret it. At Mrs. Sutton's suggestion they proceeded to a rustic bench beneath a tree, where they all sat

down, and the discourse continued. Encouraged by his manner, May ventured to ask him a few questions about himself, to which he replied with great frankness.

“I am afraid I shall sink very much in your esteem, Miss Radcliffe, when you learn my history,” he said; “but it is only proper you should be made acquainted with it. Do not be startled if I am obliged to confess that I do not know my origin. I am not even certain that the name I bear is my rightful one. A mystery hangs over my birth, which I had hoped to unravel, but which may now be never cleared up since those papers are gone. With them I fear I have lost all chance of penetrating the secret.”

“Since the papers were in your own possession, what prevented you from referring to them, and ascertaining the secret?” inquired May.

“The packet was entrusted to me on the express

condition that it should not be opened, except in the presence of a person whom I was to meet at a certain place and at a certain hour in London. With his permission—and his permission only—were the seals to be broken. The packet is irrecoverably lost, and the time of meeting has long since past.”

“And you faithfully observed your engagement?” remarked May. “Had I been in your place, I do not think I could have resisted the temptation to open the packet. What say you, Sutton?”

“I think Mr. St. Ives deserves great credit for his forbearance,” rejoined the housekeeper. “Few persons would have acted so well.”

“Having given my promise, I could not violate it,” said Hilary.

“But you know the name of the person whom you were to meet in London, and though you

failed in the appointment, owing to unforeseen circumstances, you can still find him?" observed May.

"I am entirely unacquainted with his name or address," replied Hilary. "The person was carefully described to me. The place of rendezvous was St. James's Park. Had I met him and satisfied him, I have reason to believe that a new career would have been opened to me, which might have led eventually to fortune. At any rate," he added, in a sombre tone, "I should have learnt who I am."

After a moment's pause he continued:

"I fear you will despise me, Miss Radcliffe, after the disclosure I have just made to you, but I could not allow you to remain in ignorance of my exact position, and I beg you will explain it to Mrs. Radcliffe and your father. Say that I am a mere nameless adventurer—I am really

nothing more—whom chance has brought beneath their roof, and that I am prepared to quit it at once, should they desire me to do so, full of gratitude for their kindness. My history may be summed up in a few words. Its details would have little interest for you. That I have been abandoned by my parents is certain—from what causes I can only conjecture.”

Mrs. Sutton, who had become deathly pale during his recital, averted her gaze as he looked at her.

“I know nothing but what has been told me. Those who had charge of me stated that my mother was dead, but that my father was living and in India. However, I should never be allowed to see him or learn his name. In other words, I was given plainly to understand that he would never acknowledge me.”

“But you were not utterly abandoned?” cried

May, in a compassionate tone. "I will not think so badly of human nature as to suppose so."

"No. In some respects I have had no reason to complain. Money was regularly sent for my maintenance and education, and the amount was increased, as occasion required. Mr. and Mrs. Courtenay, the persons with whom I was placed, dwelt in Exeter, near the South Gate. They were perfectly faithful to their trust. At no time, however closely questioned, would they reveal by whom the allowance was made. Perhaps they were kept in ignorance themselves.

"The Courtenays were very respectable people, not in a very exalted station in society, but tolerably well to do, and strictly honest. They had no family, and treated me with almost parental affection. Indeed, in my earlier years I looked upon myself as their son. I was educated at a public school in the city. Mr. Courtenay,

who had my welfare at heart, wished me to take a situation, which he would readily have procured me. But business did not suit me. By this time I had become acquainted with my position. Believing myself to be a gentleman born, I determined to do nothing inconsistent with the character of a gentleman. I have since seen the absurdity of my notions, and regret that I did not follow Mr. Courtenay's advice. But I was then a hot-headed boy. I became restless and dissatisfied, and, not knowing what to do with me, Mr. Courtenay supplied me with funds to go abroad; glad, I make no doubt, to get rid of me, for with my foolish fancies and pretensions, I must have been a sad trouble to him.

"I spent three years in various parts of France—chiefly at Toulouse, Tarascon, and other towns near the Pyrenees, where I could live cheaply. I ought to have mentioned that I was always fond

of drawing, and have some little talent in that line, which I now began to cultivate assiduously. I turned artist. My sketches of picturesque scenes among the Pyrenees, with groups of peasantry, were sufficiently admired to sell.

“I next proceeded to Paris, intending to establish myself there as a professional artist, and I might have succeeded in my design, for I had no lack of encouragement, if my unlucky pride had not stood in my way. I could not stoop to certain things that are indispensable to success.

“Quitting Paris in disgust—disgusted with myself I ought to say—I went to the Channel Islands, where I lingered for some months pursuing my avocations, and then returned to England. Resting at Southampton for a couple of weeks, I crossed over to Ringwood, and occupied myself in sketching the romantic scenery in the neighbourhood of that town.

“During this time I had communicated with Mr. Courtenay, and he came over to Ringwood to see me, bringing with him the all-important packet of which I have been unluckily deprived. He gave me the instructions which I have recapitulated to you, and I at last promised myself a solution of the mystery that has hitherto hung over my birth. You know how I have been disappointed. However, let that pass. I must finish my tale.

“Being a good pedestrian, I determined to proceed to London on foot. To accomplish this without hindrance, I consigned my luggage and portfolios to Mr. Courtenay. I allowed myself three days for the walk. On the fourth day I undertook to be in St. James’s Park at the hour appointed. You know the rest.”

May had listened to his narration with an interest which she did not care to dissemble. A

slight melancholy in the tone of his voice touched her feelings, while the romantic cast of his countenance harmonised with the account he gave of himself. She seemed to understand him better now she knew he was an artist.

"My pride would not allow me to make this confession to your mother," he said; "and I therefore returned somewhat evasive answers to her questions. But to *you*, Miss Radcliffe, I would not appear other than I am—a poor nameless artist."

"What better can you be than an artist?" she cried, with an enthusiasm that charmed him. "And you will soon win a name. Do not relinquish your career."

"I will not since you enjoin me to pursue it."

"I have no right to give you any advice," she said, blushing deeply, and feeling she had gone too far; "but if you possess the genius for which I give you credit, you ought not to be

diverted by any consideration from the path which is plainly pointed out to you, and which may lead to renown. Hereafter, the misfortune that has just occurred to you will appear as nothing."

"I have already said that I do not regard the occurrence as a misfortune. How can I feel otherwise than elated by the encouragement you deign to give me. If I rise in my profession to the height you have assigned me, I shall date my success from this day."

The words were uttered with so much fervour, and accompanied by a look expressing such profound homage, that May almost involuntarily cast down her eyes.

Mrs. Sutton, who had listened to what had passed, with deep but repressed emotion, now deemed it necessary to interpose, and after a few remarks upon the singularity of Hilary's story, said,

"Excuse the liberty I am about to take in

putting a question, but I observe that you wear a signet ring with a coat of arms engraved on it. Whose are the arms?"

"I cannot tell you. The ring was given me the other day by Mr. Courtenay, but without any explanation. He charged me to show it to the gentleman who was to meet me in St. James's Park, in proof of my identity."

May uttered an exclamation of surprise, and asked to look at the ring. He took it off to show it her.

She had just returned it to him, after a moment's examination of the armorial bearings, when Boston, the valet, was seen advancing towards them. He was the bearer of some letters, three or four of which he delivered to May, and then to Hilary's great surprise, handed one to him.

"For me!" exclaimed the young man. "Impossible! who can know that I am here?"

Boston smiled. He could offer no explanation. It was a registered letter, and with it was a small slip of paper, which Hilary signed with a pencil, and the valet departed.

The young man gazed in astonishment at the letter. It was unquestionably addressed to himself, in bold masculine characters—Hilary St. Ives, Esq.—with Theobald Radcliffe, Esq., Hazlemere House, Wootton, Surrey. His astonishment, however, was increased in a tenfold degree, when, after bowing to May, he opened the letter, and perceived its contents.

“Bank notes!” he ejaculated, scarcely able to credit his senses. “Bank notes to the amount of five hundred pounds! I must surely be dreaming.”

“No, I will answer for it you are awake,” cried May, who was almost equally surprised. “I can see the bank notes plainly myself.”

Mrs. Sutton, who had risen from her seat, under the pretence of gathering a flower, now returned, feigning quite as much astonishment as the others.

"This letter may afford some explanation," cried Hilary.

And he read aloud as follows :

"The friend who watches over you has heard of the disaster that has befallen you. Do not be downcast. All will be well. The enclosed remittance of five hundred pounds is made that you may not be inconvenienced in regard to money. You shall have more, should you require it. You will hear again from me before long. Meantime, a supply of wearing apparel and other necessities will be sent you."

"Have you ever heard from the writer of that letter before?" asked Mrs. Sutton, in the most natural manner imaginable.

"Never," he replied. "I do not know the handwriting. It is certainly not Mr. Courtenay's."

"You are not neglected, you see," cried May.
"What an extraordinary circumstance!"

"Extraordinary indeed!" echoed Hilary. "But by no means disagreeable. I never had so much money before."

They were still talking the matter over when Boston reappeared, and informed Hilary that a large chest had just arrived for him.

"Another wonder!" he exclaimed.

"Of course it contains the wearing apparel and other things mentioned in the letter," observed May.

"No doubt," observed Mrs. Sutton. "Let the chest be taken to the room next to Mr. Oswald's," she added to Boston.

And the valet again departed.

XV.

THE SKETCH.

SECRETLY delighted with the success of her scheme, and equally well pleased with the favourable impression which she saw Hilary had produced on her young lady, Mrs. Sutton declared she could not remain out a moment longer, as she had a great deal to do. On this hint May immediately rose to accompany her, and Hilary rose likewise, having first secured his letter with its valuable contents. The housekeeper was just about to offer him her arm when they were ar-

rested by the cheery voice of Oswald, who was hastening towards them, and came up the next moment. He was attended by Neptune, the water-spaniel, whose dripping coat showed he had been in the lake. Mrs. Sutton availed herself of this opportunity to escape, and with a glance at May hurried towards the house. Neptune bounded towards his young mistress, and barked joyously as if offering her a greeting. A slight feeling of jealousy was awakened in Oswald's bosom when he perceived Hilary. However, he nodded good naturedly to him, but addressed himself in the first instance to May, as in duty bound.

"Good morrow, fair coz," he cried. "If I were a poet I would have prepared a sonnet for the occasion, but as I have no talent in that line, you must accept my good wishes clothed in the plainest prose."

May thanked him, but told him she had ex-

pected to find him in the garden when she first came out.

“Do not suppose I have missed you,” she added. “I have been very much interested by some details which Mr. St. Ives has been giving me of his history. Are you aware he is an artist?”

“An artist!” cried Oswald, looking at the young man with an undefinable expression. “Perhaps I ought to have guessed it, but I really did not—an artist, eh?”

“Yes, an artist, though not a very distinguished one,” replied Hilary, bowing.

“You know how fond I am of drawing, Oswald,” cried May. “Mr. St. Ives must give me a few lessons.”

The young man said he should be charmed to do so. “But I suspect you have very little to learn from me, Miss Radcliffe,” he added.

“By Jove, you are right,” cried Oswald, laugh-

ing. "My cousin May draws wonderfully, and has quite a turn for caricature. She made a sketch of me and Neptune t'other day, that is worthy of a place in *Punch*. I have it with me, and will show it you."

"I forbid you!" cried May.

But at an imploring look from Hilary she relented, and the sketch was produced.

Very clever and very droll. Oswald was certainly caricatured, but the likeness was unmistakable. Neptune was admirably drawn.

"What do you think of it?" said Oswald.
"Clever, eh?"

"Capital!" exclaimed Hilary. "You do not require any instructions from me, Miss Radcliffe. I despair of rivalling this sketch, but I will attempt to make a companion to it, if you will give me two or three minutes."

May graciously assented, curious to test his skill.

"Ah, I forgot," he exclaimed, with a look of disappointment, "I have no materials with me."

"They are easily procured," said May. "I won't let you off. Fly, Oswald. My sketch-book is in the drawing-room. Bring a pencil with you."

A word from his fair cousin was a command for Oswald. He ran swiftly towards the house, and was back again almost immediately, bringing with him the things he had been sent for.

"Now, then, let us see what you can do," he cried, as he gave them to Hilary. "Ten to one you don't equal May's performance."

"I should lose the wager if I took it," replied Hilary. "I won't tax your patience too severely, Miss Radcliffe," he added. "You can't be better placed than you are."

"Pray introduce Neptune."

“And your humble servant,” added Oswald.

Seating himself upon the bench, Hilary opened the sketch-book, and finding a blank page, at once set to work, with a rapidity and freedom of touch that augured well for the successful execution of his task. Conscious of his own power he had no misgiving. With the quick eye of a true and practised artist, he seized upon all May's charms of feature and person, and transferred them with almost photographic accuracy, and yet with a grace that no photograph can reach, to the sheet of paper before him. May's colour rose as she felt his keen dark eye fixed upon her, but she did not alter her position. Couched at her feet, Neptune remained quiet, though looking up at her face.

In an inconceivably short space of time Hilary had completed his task. A masterly sketch. May was reproduced to the life, in all her grace and

beauty. She blushed with pleasure as the sketch was submitted to her.

"I have not done you justice, but that is impossible," observed Hilary.

"You have flattered me very much," rejoined May.

"No such thing," cried Oswald. "The sketch is wonderfully like. 'Pon my soul, you are a devilish clever artist, St. Ives, that I must say. But I bargained for a place, and you have left me out altogether. Too bad."

"I will take you some other time," rejoined Hilary, smiling.

"You think I should have spoiled the sketch, eh?"

"I did not say so, or mean so. You will see that I have dated the sketch, Miss Radcliffe. May I venture to beg your acceptance of it as a trifling memorial of the day."

Graciously accepted.

"I must show the sketch to mamma," cried May. "It will enchant her. I am going to her room. Have I permission to relate your history to her? She will be so much interested by it."

"You will oblige me by doing so," replied Hilary.

And she tripped off towards the house, followed by Neptune.

Certain it is that Oswald had already become jealous of the handsome young stranger, who had somehow contrived to interest his fair cousin; but he was very good-hearted, and tried to keep down the feelings of dislike and distrust which he felt rising in his breast. After all, he thought, the young chap is only an artist. So as soon as May was gone he put on rather a patronising manner, and said,

"That sketch of Miss Radcliffe is capital. I must have a copy of it—hang the price."

"I shall be very happy to copy the sketch for

you. But I cannot accept payment," replied Hilary, rather haughtily.

"Too proud, eh?"

"No, not too proud," rejoined the other. "But I am under great obligations to you, and shall be delighted to make any little return in my power."

"I tell you what it is, my dear fellow," cried Oswald, who, though very good-natured, was apt to commit blunders. "I think I can find you a good job."

"I do not require a job," rejoined the other, coldly.

"Hear what it is, before you decline it. There's a devilish handsome woman coming here this morning—Lady Richborough. Perhaps you may heard of her, or seen her?"

Hilary shook his head.

"Well, she's a stunner—handsome enough to

take away your breath. Hasn't she a seat on horseback?—Miss Reynolds is nothing to her. Can't she handle a cue? I rather think so. I played with her at billiards yesterday. Every attitude was a study. I couldn't strike a ball, and got knocked to pieces in no time. I think I could get her to sit to you—or you might sketch her off-hand, as you took my cousin May just now."

"Anything you wish. Command me."

"Thanks. I know you'll be struck of a heap when you see her ladyship. Her brother, Sir Charles Ilminster, wouldn't make a bad portrait, and I dare say he'd sit, if I asked him. I will, if you like. They were both talking about you yesterday—wondering who you were; but I couldn't tell them you are an artist, for I didn't know it myself then."

"Don't fancy for a moment that I am ashamed of my profession. But I don't care to obtrude it."

“ Exactly. I understand. No man need be ashamed of his profession—whatever it may be—provided it’s respectable. Perhaps Sir Charles may invite you to Boxgrove. If he does, go. Picturesque old place. Just suit you. Lots of artists go to see it. Maclise and Calderon went to see it a few weeks ago. Nash has it in his ‘Mansions of the Olden Time.’ All in perfect preservation. Magnificent banquet-hall, with great carved oak screen, gallery, moulded ceiling and pendants. Grand old oak staircase. Long corridors filled with old family portraits—dames and knights. Not one of the former beauties half so lovely as Lady Richborough, though. And for that matter, Sir Charles is better looking than any of his ancestors. What with portraits, carved chimney-pieces, tapestried chambers, and antiquated furniture, you’ll find a great deal to your taste at Boxgrove, I can promise you.”

“ From what you say I make no doubt I

should," replied Hilary. "You give me an excellent idea of the old place, and your description of Lady Richborough is quite captivating."

"Does no justice to the original, as you'll admit when you see her. She's a beauty—and no mistake. But come! we must be moving towards the house. The gong will soon sound for breakfast. I think my aunt will make her appearance. A very charming person—but I forget you've seen her."

"I have," replied Hilary, "and I quite agree with you. She is charming."

"Thinks herself still twenty-five—that's her only fault," replied Oswald, laughing. "Apropos of pictures! you'll see her portrait, by Grant, in the dining-room. Laud it to the skies, and you'll win her heart."

With this he offered his arm, and they walked at a very leisurely pace to the house.

Just as they reached the terrace, Mr. Radcliffe

came forth, without his hat, looking very cheerful and hearty. Shaking hands cordially with Hilary, he congratulated him upon his recovery.

"He's curious to know who and what you are," whispered Oswald. "Shall I enlighten him as to the artistic profession?"

"By all means," replied the young man.

Oswald then imparted all he knew to his uncle, who did not seem surprised to learn that Hilary was an artist.

"Glad to hear it," he cried. "You could have no better recommendation to me. A man of talent is always welcome at Hazlemere."

More might have been said, but the gong sounded, and they went in to breakfast.

XVI.

BREAKFAST.

THE dining-room, in which breakfast was served, was large and well-proportioned, being designed for hospitality on a grand scale; but Mr. Radcliffe, owing to his wife's delicate health, only gave small dinners, never exceeding ten or twelve. With its round table, massive sideboard, thick Turkey carpet, folding screens, portraits and pictures, the room had a very comfortable air. French windows opened upon the terrace, and a side window looked out upon the parterres

and walls covered with magnolias, which we have previously described. Over the chimney-piece hung a full-length portrait of the lady of the house, with her then infantine daughter—the work of an eminent artist, since elevated to the chair of the Royal Academy. Other noticeable pictures graced the walls, the chief among them being a pony and a Scotch terrier of the Dandie Dinmont breed, by Sir Edwin, a marine piece by Stanfield, and the high altar in the church of the Holy Apostles at Rome, by Roberts.

Such was the ordinary appearance of the room; but this being an extraordinary occasion, it had quite a floral aspect, befitting the day. Flowers everywhere—on the chimney-piece, and on the corners of the sideboard. Choice plants from the greenhouse and conservatory were placed on temporary stands. A beautifully arranged flower vase occupied the centre of the table; and the

initials of the young May Queen, traced with great skill on the snow-white cover in flowers of various hues, produced a charming effect. The atmosphere was warm and odorous, Mrs. Radcliffe having ordered a fire, and enjoined that no window should be left open.

May and her mother were in the room when the gentlemen entered. For a wonder Mrs. Radcliffe had come down thus early, more, we think, from the desire to please Hilary, than from regard for her lovely daughter. May was occupied at the breakfast table, at which she always officiated. Her mother was standing by the fire, looking slight, delicate, graceful, carefully got up with an eye to effect, and holding an embroidered kerchief in her hand. Hilary's quick eye took in at a glance the decorations of the room, the persons within it, and the pictures. Oswald set up a shout, and fairly clapped his

hands. Having first tenderly embraced his daughter and given her his blessing, the old gentleman began to look around, and expressed his satisfaction at the arrangements, though he secretly wished he could let a breath of air into the room.

Meanwhile, Hilary had advanced to Mrs. Radcliffe, by whom he was very graciously received, though she rallied him on his want of candour towards her on their first meeting.

“Why did you not tell me you are a painter, Mr. St. Ives? What need of concealment? Artists are my delight. I am proud to number Sir Edwin and several others of note among my friends.”

Hilary excused himself as he best could, adding that he was not worthy to be classed with the distinguished painters she had mentioned, being merely a tyro.

"Do not disparage yourself," said the lady, with one of her most captivating smiles. "Your sketch of my daughter proves you have consummate skill. I must put your power to a severer test."

"I shall never dare to try my feeble hand, after seeing that matchless performance," he replied, glancing at the portrait. "You have been fortunate in finding a painter capable of appreciating you and doing you justice. Ah! if I could ever hope to rival that."

"Why should you not?"

"Because it is perfection, and unapproachable. Its beauty drives me to despair."

"You have one requisite for success in your profession," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe, smiling. "You can flatter gracefully."

"You should see Sir William Newton's miniature of my aunt," interposed Oswald. "That's

something like a portrait. It's an out-and-out better likeness than this."

"That I must take leave to deny, though I have not seen it," replied Hilary. "A miniature may be exquisite, but it will not bear a moment's comparison with a finished oil-painting such as we have before us."

"I can take no part in this discussion as to the relative merits of the pictures," observed Mrs. Radcliffe, smiling. "But I am rather partial to the miniature, I must own."

"It is considered Sir William's chef-d'œuvre, and by very good judges," remarked Mr. Radcliffe.

"I must defer to the general opinion," said Hilary. "But——"

"You maintain your own," observed Mrs. Radcliffe. "Well, you shall see the miniature by-and-by, and then you can fairly decide."

“Meantime, I must beg you to bestow a glance on my pony and dog,” cried May, joining the group near the fire-place. “Are they not charmingly painted?”

As may be supposed, Hilary was enchanted with the picture, which was really admirable, and was still extolling it, when Mr. Luff, the butler, who was almost as portly as his master, and about the same age, waddled into the room, followed by Boston, bearing a chased silver coffee-pot, which emitted a grateful odour, cutlets, broiled salmon-trout, and all the *et ceteras* requisite for a good breakfast.

Hereupon, the whole party sat down at table. Hilary was assigned a seat between the two ladies, and feeling now quite at ease, since full explanation had been given, he conversed naturally and agreeably. There was certainly a fascination in his manner, which both mother and

daughter experienced in an almost equal degree. Even Mr. Radcliffe was delighted with him. Oswald had a keen appetite that morning—indeed, he was a famous trencherman at all times—and devoted himself to the cold chicken and Montanches ham, with which Mr. Luff, who knew his tastes, supplied him, leaving the talking to be done by Hilary, and only now and then putting in a word. But he began to think the young man was getting on rather too well with his aunt and his fair cousin, and that it behoved him to put a stop to it, but he didn't see exactly how the thing was to be done at the moment. No such feelings influenced Mr. Radcliffe. Nothing pleased him better than to see his wife and daughter pleased. And they evidently were so. If the truth must be told, the worthy old gentleman, who was not insensible to the importance of rank, was secretly much disappointed

that May could not make up her mind to accept Sir Charles Ilminster. He had talked the matter over with her quietly on the previous evening, and had dilated on the advantages of the alliance, which were palpable enough, as well as on Sir Charles's merits, which were equally palpable, but he could not induce her to alter her decision. All he could obtain was a promise that she would not give the baronet an absolute refusal. Just now, when they first met, he had taken her aside for a moment and questioned her, but her sentiments remained unchanged.

He felt half disposed to be angry, but as he gazed at her fair face, and saw how happy she seemed, the feeling quickly vanished, and he tried to reconcile himself to his disappointment. He saw plainly enough that her charms had produced an effect upon Hilary; but that May would ever bestow a serious thought upon a poor

artist, however handsome and agreeable he might be, never entered his head. So he ate his breakfast tranquilly, and joined in the conversation whenever opportunity offered.

May was of the same opinion as her father. Not conceiving it possible she could entertain a feeling stronger than that of common interest for a nameless artist, she did not think it necessary to be on her guard, or to adopt a distant manner towards him, which might at once have crushed his hopes, if he ventured to indulge any. Unconsciously, therefore, she encouraged him, so that the flame, already kindled in his bosom, began to burn more fiercely, and, before breakfast was over, he was desperately in love with her.

Mrs. Radcliffe, who had watched him narrowly, and was gifted with very quick powers of observation in such matters, quite understood the state of his feelings.

She also thought May was slightly touched ; but on this point she did not feel quite sure.

Before she came down stairs, Mrs. Radcliffe had had a brief conversation with her daughter respecting Sir Charles, but had not—doubtless from the best motives—attempted to dissuade her from declining his offer.

Inquiring about the plans for the day, Oswald was informed that nothing could be settled until after the arrival of grandpapa.

“We must wait at home for him, of course,” remarked May.

“Besides, you will have visitors, in all probability,” observed her mamma.

“Yes, I think you may expect Sir Charles and his sister at luncheon,” said Oswald, innocently. “Her ladyship told me they meant to ride over this morning to offer their compliments to May.”

"Very kind," said the young lady, glancing at mamma.

"I shall be very glad to see them," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe. "I hope we may prevail upon them to stay dinner."

"I don't think that at all likely, mamma," said May.

"At any rate I shall ask them," observed papa.

Breakfast, which had been somewhat profuse, was now nearly over. Already Mrs. Radcliffe had begun to complain of fatigue. Begging Hilary to excuse her, she rose with the intention of retiring to her boudoir. Oswald flew to open the door, when who should come in but Mr. Thornton—in his hat and great-coat, just as he had arrived.

He stood still for a moment or two, to give full effect to his appearance, chuckling inwardly at his daughter's well-feigned surprise, and at

the exclamations of astonishment that rose from the breakfast-table.

He then burst into a loud laugh, and called out, "Didn't expect to see me, eh? Grandpapa couldn't be absent on his darling May's birthday. Where is she?—where is my child? Let her gladden my eyes."

"Here I am, dearest grandpapa," cried May, rushing towards him, and flinging her arms round his neck. "Thank you so much for coming to see me to-day."

"I couldn't keep away, I tell you, though you didn't invite me," he rejoined, pressing his lips to her smooth brow. "Bless you, my love! Many, many happy returns of the day. I haven't forgotten you," he added, giving her the box of trinkets.

"Another birthday present!" exclaimed May.

"Only a few trifles. Look at them by-and-by."

He then advanced into the room, embraced his daughter, who professed to be charmed by his wholly unexpected visit, and shook hands very cordially with Mr. Radcliffe and Oswald. He did not pay much attention to Hilary, who had got up to examine the pictures, and whose back was towards him.

"Just in time," cried Mr. Radcliffe. "We haven't half done breakfast, and if we had we could begin again. Hot coffee in a minute."

"Let me help you off with your great-coat, sir," said Oswald.

"Stop a minute!" cried Mr. Thornton, assuming a mysterious air. "Fact is, I've brought a friend with me."

"Delighted to hear it," replied Mr. Radcliffe. "Bring him in at once. Has your friend breakfasted?"

"No, we left town early," replied Mr. Thorn-

ton. Becoming still more mysterious, he added to his daughter, "An old friend of yours, my dear—an old and valued friend—has come purposely to see you."

"An old friend of mine!" she exclaimed, struck by his manner, and having a strange presentiment of the truth. "Oh! good gracious, papa—how could you? Why not let me know beforehand? I can't be taken by surprise in this way. You know how frightfully nervous I am, and the sudden apparition of an old friend whom I didn't expect might kill me. Don't tell me who he is—don't. Bring him to my boudoir after you have had breakfast. By that time I shall be prepared."

"But my dear——"

Mrs. Radcliffe would not listen to a word more, but hurried away.

Not to the boudoir, however, but to Mrs.

Sutton's room. She trembled lest she should find any one in the hall—but she did not. Where could he be?

The door of the housekeeper's room was closed, but voices could be heard within. Her presentiments were correct. It was he. She knew his voice. She would have taken flight instantly, if she had had the power to move. But her strength was gone, and she was obliged to lean against the wall for support.

XVII.

WHAT PASSED IN THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM.

NOT many minutes before Mr. Thornton presented himself at the dining-room door, as previously related, he and Colonel Delacombe had arrived at Hazlemere. Determined to carry out his plan in his own way, the old gentleman would not allow the servants to give any intimation of their arrival; but directing Mr. Luff to look after the luggage, and pay the coachman who had driven them from the station, he begged the

colonel to wait for him for a few moments, and left him.

Colonel Delacombe was standing near the door, finishing his cigar, and wondering within himself whether all would go off smoothly, when a livid face appeared before him. The expression of the face was so deadly and menacing, that a thrill of apprehension shot through his frame.

Mrs. Sutton had witnessed the arrival of the two gentlemen from a back window that looked upon the yard, and though filled with rage and terror on beholding Colonel Delacombe, for whose appearance she was unable to account, she resolved at once to have an explanation with him.

The opportunity was offered her by Mr. Thornton. With wonderful self-command under the circumstances, she approached the unwelcome visitor, and begged him to step into her room for a moment. Though he would have gladly

avoided the interview just then, the colonel could not refuse, but, throwing away his cigar, followed her immediately.

Closing the door, she put no further constraint upon herself, but fixing a determined look upon him, demanded, in threatening tones :

“What brings you here? To come hither to molest me is an act of madness on your part, as you ought to feel. If there is to be war between us, I shall not shrink from it, and be sure you will not come off victorious. I will use all the weapons I possess against you, and I have many, without scruple.”

The colonel, who was a very cool hand, did not seem alarmed, and she proceeded yet more fiercely.

“What has brought you here, I ask again? Do you wish to expose me? Take care. I am dangerous — more dangerous than you suspect.

Utter a word, and I will retaliate. Mark what I say—retaliate. Certain papers have just fallen into my hands, which place you completely in my power. Now do you understand ? ”

“ Poh ! poh ! ” cried Colonel Delacombe. “ This is mere raving, and only makes me doubt your sanity. You ask if I have come to expose you. Knowing nothing about you, what can I have to expose ? You ask what has brought me here. I will tell you in a word. I have come at the special invitation of my worthy old friend, Mr. Thornton, simply for the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with his daughter, Mrs. Radcliffe, and with no intention whatever of troubling you. Indeed, I only accidentally learnt you were here. Having so far satisfied you, I must beg to put an end to this interview—entirely unsought on my part—unless you can be content to talk rationally and calmly. Recriminations are ridi-

culous. I have no accusation to bring against you. To the best of my knowledge, I never saw you before yesterday. I then fancied—mind, it was only fancy—that you resembled one whom I dearly loved in former years, *but whom I know to be dead*. I am sorry to see the likeness has wholly disappeared, and has given place to something totally different. I acknowledge my mistake, and apologise for it.”

“It is no mistake, Seymour,” she rejoined, in a more subdued tone, and with something even of sadness. “She whom you formerly professed to love still lives.”

“I know better,” he said, coldly. “She has been dead these twenty years.”

“I could easily convince you to the contrary. But there is no need, since you are fully aware of the fact.”

“Excuse me, madam,” said the colonel. “I

don't see why this discussion should be prolonged, or to what it can possibly lead. I have given you my positive assurance that I do not design to meddle with you, and you may depend upon it I will keep my word. Even if there were any secret between you and myself—and there is none—it would be my interest to keep it. You can, therefore, have nothing to apprehend from me. So far from desiring to molest you, if I can tender you any service, I shall be delighted to do so, and you have only to command me.”

Mrs. Sutton looked at him for a moment with irrepressible tenderness, and, in spite of her efforts, tears sprang to her eyes, but she checked her emotion.

“I am very sorry on all accounts that you have come here at this juncture,” she said. “Your presence cannot fail to produce awkward complications, and may lead—in spite of all my care to prevent them—to untoward consequences.”

"I will leave immediately, if I find I am in the way," he said.

"That would not mend matters," she rejoined. "Undoubtedly, you are in the way—very much in the way—but your immediate departure would provoke remark, and excite suspicion. Since you have come it is best you should stay. You owe me much. I will not reproach you. I will not threaten you more. I will not appeal to the past. But I implore you to compassionate me—to serve me."

"Since you adopt this tone, I will do anything you require," replied the colonel, attempting to take her hand, which she withdrew with a shudder.

"Promise me, then—promise me solemnly," she cried, "that, during your stay here, whatever you may learn, or whomsoever you meet, you will give no explanation that can in the remotest degree compromise me. Above all, promise that

you will make no allusion to our past connexion."

"Though for the life of me I cannot imagine what you allude to, I promise implicit secrecy on all points," said the colonel, lightly.

"There must be no trifling," said Mrs. Sutton. "My existence hangs upon your caution. Swear that you will not breathe a word."

"I swear it," replied the colonel. "Have you anything more to say to me? Any further directions to give?"

"None. Be cautious. Do not betray me or yourself. Recollect that I am merely the housekeeper—nothing more. You must not stay longer here. Mr. Thornton will be looking for you. I will go with you to the hall."

As they issued forth they saw a retreating figure at the end of the passage.

"Heavens!" ejaculated the housekeeper, "th

is Mrs. Radcliffe. Can she have been here and overheard us?"

"Diable! I hope not," replied the colonel.
"That would be a bad beginning."

When they reached the entrance hall, Mrs. Radcliffe had disappeared.

She had flown up-stairs to her boudoir with a precipitancy that perfectly electrified Annette, who chanced to witness the performance.

XVIII.

A SECOND BREAKFAST.

MRS. SUTTON was still with the colonel when the dining-room door opened and Mr. Thornton came forth with Mr. Radcliffe. The latter shook hands very heartily with his unexpected visitor, welcomed him to Hazlemere, and told him how delighted his wife would be to see him. Orders were then given to Mrs. Sutton, who had resumed her customary rôle, to prepare a room for the colonel. Mr. Thornton having his own room, there was no occasion to say anything about that.

Further orders were given to the butler to serve a second breakfast as quickly as possible; and these matters being arranged, Mr. Radcliffe conducted the colonel to the dining-room, and introduced him to May.

No one else was in the room at the time. The windows had been thrown open by Mr. Radcliffe, and Oswald and Hilary had stepped out into the garden.

May's charms surpassed any notions that the colonel had formed of them. She was struck by his distinguished appearance and manner, but yet more struck by a certain resemblance which she fancied she detected between him and Hilary. It could scarcely be fancy, for the resemblance seemed to increase as she saw more of him.

After making all the complimentary speeches proper to the occasion, admiring the floral decorations of the room and the table, the colonel

inquired, with an expression of great interest, about mamma, and learnt that she had just retired to her boudoir, but would be delighted to see him after breakfast. The portrait over the chimney-piece next invited his attention, and he was expatiating with rapture upon its beauty, and exclaiming, "Yes, there she is, just as I beheld her last," when his rhapsodies were checked by a summons to the breakfast-table from Mr. Thornton.

"Sit down, colonel, pray sit down!" cried the old gentleman. "I'm sure you must be hungry. I am desperately so. A cup of coffee if you please, May."

"Here it comes, grandpapa," she rejoined, as a fresh supply of hot coffee, broils, tea-cakes, and toast was brought in by the butler.

Meantime, Mr. Radcliffe had been busy at the sideboard carving cold fowl, ham, and tongue,

so that his guests had wherewithal to make a good breakfast. The colonel differed from Oswald. While satisfying his appetite, he contrived to converse most agreeably, and May was never more entertained than by his lively discourse.

They were still at the breakfast-table when the two young men, who were smoking their cigars on the terrace, passed rather slowly in front of the window.

"Who the deuce have you got there, May?" demanded Mr. Thornton, looking after them.

"Oswald's companion is Mr. Hilary St. Ives, grandpapa," she replied.

"And who may Mr. St. Ives be?—what is he?" asked the old gentleman.

"An artist," returned May.

"An artist!" echoed Mr. Thornton, with a strong expression of contempt. "Then he has no business here."

"Why not, dear grandpapa?" she rejoined.

"Besides, Mr. St. Ives was not invited."

And she then proceeded to explain how the young man chanced to be at the house. Mr. Thornton knew all about it, as we are aware; but he feigned ignorance, and when May had finished her recital, signified his disapproval, and told Mr. Radcliffe plainly he had been far too kind.

"Nay, indeed, I must defend papa, if a kind action can require defence," cried May. "It would have been quite inconsistent with his character to act otherwise. If he had done so, I should not love him half as well as I do."

"Humph!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "You mean to insinuate, you pert little minx, that grandpapa has not the common feelings of humanity, eh? May be not. His compassion certainly does not proceed to this extent. Pos-

sibly, he might bring a wounded man home with him—though I think he would have taken him to an inn—but when the fellow had got well enough to walk about and smoke a cigar, he would have given him immediate notice to quit.”

“All depends upon the person, dear grand-papa,” rejoined May. “Mr. St. Ives is very clever, and very gentlemanlike, and when you see him, you won’t wonder that mamma has invited him to remain a few days and recruit. He has not quite recovered yet.”

“He wouldn’t be well now, if Sutton hadn’t nursed him so carefully,” observed Mr. Radcliffe. “She has done more for him than the doctor.”

“I dare say,” rejoined the old gentleman. “But you know nothing about the young man, except that he’s an artist, and I don’t approve of his remaining in the house. I shall talk to your wife about him presently.”

"You may spare yourself the trouble, sir. You won't produce much effect," laughed Mr. Radcliffe.

"From the glimpse I caught of him just now, the young man appears to be good-looking and gentlemanlike," observed the colonel.

"Remarkably so," said Mr. Radcliffe.

"Let us go and have a look at him," cried the old gentleman, rising. "Have you finished breakfast, colonel?"

"Quite," replied the other.

"I am sure *you* will be pleased with the young man, colonel," remarked Mr. Radcliffe.

"Why so, sir?"

"Well, I have a reason. But see him first, and then I'll tell it you."

"Since he has won the good opinion of Mrs. Radcliffe and your daughter, I am sure to be pleased with him," said the colonel.

The whole party then went out upon the terrace. Colonel Delacombe was enchanted with the prospect offered to his view. While he was indulging in the raptures naturally called forth by such a charming scene, Mr. Radcliffe looked about for the young men. They had quitted the terrace. Presently Oswald made his appearance, but he was alone.

“What have you done with St. Ives?” inquired his uncle.

“Left him in the summer-house sketching,” replied the young man.

Oswald was then presented in due form to Colonel Delacombe, who expressed particular pleasure on making his acquaintance. As the young man drew back, he remarked in a whisper to his uncle,

“Very odd! Don’t you perceive the likeness?”

"Likeness to whom?" said his uncle, with a droll look.

"Why to St. Ives, of course. Don't you perceive it? Surprising!"

"Hush! not a word of that just now. I want to see them together."

"Shall I bring St. Ives here?" asked Oswald.

"No; we'll go to the summer-house."

The plan, however, was defeated by Mrs. Sutton, who brought her mistress's compliments to Colonel Delacombe. Mrs. Radcliffe did not feel quite strong enough to come down-stairs, having rather over exerted herself that morning, but would be delighted to see the colonel if he would take the trouble to step up to her boudoir.

"My mistress is all impatience to see you, sir," added the housekeeper.

Of course the colonel was happy to obey the summons, and bowing his excuses to May, fol-

lowed the housekeeper, who waited to conduct him to her mistress.

This interposition destroyed Mr. Radcliffe's anticipated joke—at all events postponed it. So he took Mr. Thornton to the summer-house.

Not for a moment did Mrs. Sutton forget her part. The servants were moving about, and she knew their eyes were upon her. Her demeanour to the colonel as they went up-stairs was most respectful. She told him a room had been prepared for him, and that Boston, the valet, would attend upon him.

But just before they reached the boudoir, she said, in a low tone,

“Reassure yourself. She was there as we supposed. But she heard nothing.”

XIX.

HOW THEY MET AFTER LONG YEARS.

NOT for the universe would Mrs. Radcliffe have had the meeting with her old lover take place in the presence of any other person than the housekeeper, to whom she had confided her heart's secret.

"Oh! he is come, Sutton!" she cried. "Seymour is come! What am I to do?"

Scarcely able to repress her own feelings of aversion and scorn, the housekeeper replied, that

whatever she might feel, she owed it to her husband and her daughter to keep calm. There must be no outward manifestation of emotion—no fainting—no hysterics—no scene.

“There shall be nothing of the kind, I promise you, Sutton.”

“Treat him merely as an old friend, whom you are rejoiced to see again. That is what you ought to do—*must* do.”

“I mean to do so. There shall be no display of emotion. But I must see him alone. I dread the first meeting. That over, I shall be myself.”

The housekeeper objected to this very strongly, but suffered herself to be overcome, perceiving, probably, that Mrs. Radcliffe would have her own way.

She was occupied for the next half hour in the ungrateful, to her almost revolting, task of preparing her mistress for the interview. Mrs.

Radcliffe made many alterations in her toilette, and was scarcely satisfied in the end.

“How would he like to see me, do you think, Sutton?” she asked, with the anxiety of a girl.
“Will this do?”

The housekeeper muttered a reply, in which contempt was thinly veiled.

“Now you can bring him to me, Sutton,” she cried. “Stay! we have forgotten one thing—his miniature!”

“What of it?” asked the housekeeper, sharply.

“Restore it to its place. I would have him notice it.”

Mrs. Sutton reluctantly complied, and the miniature was hung up again.

“Now do have pity upon me, there’s a dear creature, and bring him to me directly,” entreated Mrs. Radcliffe. “No one else, mind.”

“Pity!” ejaculated the housekeeper, as she left

the boudoir, and could give vent to her feelings. "Miserable woman, expect no pity from me. When the time comes, I will have payment in full."

As soon as she was alone, Mrs. Radcliffe surveyed herself in her mirror, with the eye of an experienced coquette, glancing at her coiffure, and examining the minutest details of her dress. A trifle of rouge being given to her cheek, she thought she would do. She then seated herself in her fauteuil in the most graceful attitude she could assume. A flutter of excitement agitated her breast, as she heard his footsteps in the passage.

The door opened. Mrs. Sutton ushered in the colonel, and immediately retired, though not without casting a bitter and vindictive look at her mistress.

Mrs. Radcliffe did not rise. With an exclaima-

tion of pleasure, she extended her hand towards him.

He took it, and pressed the delicate fingers to his lips.

A brief interval ensued, during which both were silent. In thought they had flown back to former days. Both were young again. He still retained her hand, and the thin fingers trembled in his grasp. She became perceptibly agitated, and her lips quivered, but, determined not to give way, she motioned him to take a seat opposite her, and he complied.

"This is indeed a pleasure to me, Seymour," she said, with a tenderness of expression which she could not control. "I never expected to behold you again."

"And I never expected—never intended to return to my native country," he replied, in much the same tone. "But circumstances have brought me back, and my first visit is to you, Esther."

She smiled faintly.

"I am truly glad to see you. Accept my congratulations upon your brilliant achievements in India, and upon the honours you have won. All your friends must feel proud of you. I do."

"If you are proud of me, Esther, I am content. I care more for your esteem than that of any other. I have won distinction, but I am not happy."

"You ought to be happy, Seymour."

"You know well why I am not, Esther. *You* are happy, I presume. You have a charming daughter—a most lovely girl—your image. The sight of her almost unmanned me."

"May is far lovelier than I ever was, Seymour. I hope you like Mr. Radcliffe?"

"I appreciate his good qualities and his bonhomie; but I cannot forgive him for robbing me——"

"No more of this, Seymour. Not a word

against my husband, or you forfeit my friendship entirely."

"You quite mistake me. I have not the slightest idea of disparaging him. I am sure Mr. Radcliffe is a pattern husband. Well, you see I have kept my word. I have returned from India as I went out—a bachelor. I deserve some praise, for I might have made more than one capital match."

"I cannot doubt it, Seymour," she rejoined. "But, pardon me—you say bachelor—ought you not rather to describe yourself as a widower?"

"A widower!" he exclaimed, staring at her. "What mean you, Esther?"

Mrs. Radcliffe made no reply, but looked down and played with her eye-glass.

The colonel rose from his seat and approached her.

"There is only one person on earth whom I

would have married, and she jilted me," he said, earnestly.

"There you wrong her," replied the lady. "She did not jilt you, Seymour, and you know it. She was forced to give you up. Pray do not recal that unhappy time."

"I would not give you an instant's pain if I could help it, Esther. Far less do I desire to open long-closed wounds. But you appear to have got a notion in your head which it is necessary I should remove."

"Really, Seymour, I meant nothing. It was merely a foolish fancy of my own. Forgive me for making the observation. I see it has disturbed you."

"From any other lips than yours the remark would have been perfectly indifferent to me, and I should have laughed at it. But I cannot allow you to labour under the slightest misappre-

hension. Some mischief-maker must have hinted this to you. By-the-by," he added, in a careless tone, and as if changing the subject, "you have got a very superior sort of person as house-keeper."

"He suspects Sutton, I perceive," thought Mrs. Radcliffe. "I am not surprised you should be struck with her. Most people are so. Mrs. Sutton has lived with me nineteen years—ever since May was born, in fact—and is invaluable to me."

"Who is she?" asked the colonel. "She looks like a lady."

"I know little of her previous history, except that she was married very young to a worthless man, who deserted her, but fortunately died. I have not questioned her much about her husband, as you may suppose, for the subject is extremely painful to her. Apparently, she has no ties, for I never hear her speak of her rela-

tions. She has devoted herself exclusively to me, and I have the greatest confidence in her."

"I am sure your confidence is not misplaced. You are most fortunate in possessing such a treasure."

"She is a treasure, and I should be sorry to lose her. She might marry very well, if she chose. Mr. Malham, the surgeon—a most respectable man, and very well to do—has spoken to me about her, but she won't listen to him for a moment. She has had too bitter an experience of wedded life to run a second risk."

"The housekeeper is mistress here, that I can see," thought the colonel. "I am glad on your account, though sorry for poor Malham, that Mrs. Sutton has so decided," he added, aloud. "What a charming boudoir you have got! An Indian life would suit you, Esther. You would be idolised at Calcutta or Bombay. Why not

go back with me when I return—and I haven't got long leave?—taking Mr. Radcliffe and May with you, of course."

"How can you make such an absurd proposition?" she exclaimed. But she did not seem displeased, and added, with a half sigh, "I do think my delicate health might be improved by a few years spent in a climate like that of India."

"Not a doubt of it. Apropos of India, I see you have got my old Bengal tiger here. The magnificent brute who once owned that skin might have made a meal of me. My first shot only wounded him. He sprang upon my elephant, who had enough to do to bear his weight, killed my mahout, and in another instant would have reached my howdah, if I had not despatched him by a ball through the brain. I never shall forget the ferocious aspect of the beast as I fired. It was an awful moment."

"I have your letter describing the terrific encounter, Seymour. In fact, I have all your letters."

The colonel did not seem much gratified by the information. But he made no remark.

"I keep them in that casket," pursued the lady. "Look round. Do you notice anything over the chimney-piece? Any souvenir of former days?"

"Ah! the miniature I gave you. That was taken in my beaux jours. I had not a scarred cheek and a grey moustache then."

"The scar improves you, Seymour, and so does the grey moustache."

He then fell into raptures with the other miniature, and was still admiring it when the door opened, and Mr. Radcliffe came in.

"Sorry to interrupt your tête-à-tête," he remarked, in an apologetic tone. "But you will excuse me I am sure, my love."

"We have no more secrets to discuss," replied the lady.

"In that case I need not hesitate. Mr. St. Ives is without," he added, with a significant glance at his wife. "Have I your permission to bring him in."

Charmed by the idea of witnessing the meeting, Mrs. Radcliffe graciously assented.

"Come in!" cried Mr. Radcliffe.

Thereupon Hilary entered the boudoir, followed by Mr. Thornton, who was obliged to hold a handkerchief to his mouth to stifle his merriment.

Mr. Radcliffe went through his part very well, though he had to check a strong tendency to laughter.

"Allow me, colonel, to present to you our young artist, Mr. Hilary St. Ives," he said, leading the young man forward.

Colonel Delacombe moved politely towards him,

but suddenly stopped and stared at Hilary, who looked quite as much astonished as himself.

Thus brought face to face, the resemblance between them was seen to be very striking, allowing, of course, for difference of age. Even their height corresponded as nearly as might be, though the colonel was a trifle the taller of the two. Naturally, the advantages of youth were on Hilary's side, and the palm of good looks must have been assigned to him, but he wanted the refinement of manner and proud military bearing that lent so much distinction to the bronzed and scarred soldier.

Half-suppressed laughter reached the colonel's ears, warning him that he was the object of a practical joke. He glanced at Mr. Radcliffe, as much as to say, "I now understand why the young fellow was brought here." He then addressed Hilary.

"Glad to know you, Mr. St. Ives. Your features appear familiar to me."

"I should think they must be," muttered Mr. Thornton; "uncommonly familiar."

"I was about to make the same remark, colonel," said Hilary. "If it were not presumption on my part, I would venture to observe——"

"That you have discovered a likeness," supplied Mr. Radcliffe, laughing. "So have we all."

"Never saw such a likeness in all my born days!" exclaimed Mr. Thornton, indulging in a roar. "Excuse me, colonel—I can't help it—ha! ha!"

"I won't affect to misunderstand what you mean," said the colonel, joining in the laugh. "You pay me a much greater compliment than you do Mr. St. Ives."

"I should be proud to be thought like you, colonel," said Hilary.

"Then make yourself easy on that score, young man," remarked Mr. Thornton.

Mrs. Radcliffe, who had looked on through her eye-glass, much amused by the scene, added her testimony to that of her father.

"We have provided you with a son, colonel," said Mr. Thornton, in a loud whisper.

"A son!" exclaimed the other. "My good sir, I wish I had such a son as Mr. St. Ives. But you know very well I have never married."

While making the assertion, he cast a glance at Mrs. Radcliffe, and saw that she was smiling.

"Excuse me, colonel," said Hilary. "May I venture to ask if you chance to know Mr. Courtenay of Exeter?—or have had any correspondence with him?"

"Courtenay! I know lots of Courtenays. Major Courtenay, of the 2nd Foot, is my bosom friend; and Captain Chichester Courtenay, of the

21st, is another great friend. But they are both in India—one at Bombay, the other at Madras. I have no acquaintance with Mr. Courtenay of Exeter, nor have I ever corresponded with him. Does your friend belong to the Devon family?"

Hilary shook his head, abashed.

Before any further questions could be put, an interruption was offered by May, who came to inform her mother that Lady Richborough and Sir Charles had just arrived.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe. "I didn't expect them so soon. Well, go at once with your papa to receive them. I will come down as soon as I can. You will like Sir Charles," she added to Colonel Delacombe.

"I'm sure of it," he rejoined. "I've heard of him. He was in the —th Lancers."

"I will say nothing about his sister, Lady Richborough, except that you are certain to fall

in love with her. Go down and see her. Mr. Radcliffe will introduce you."

"Yes, come along," cried that gentleman.
"You'll find her ladyship a most charming person."

"I must beg to be introduced at the same time," said Mr. Thornton, following them.

Thus Mrs. Radcliffe was left alone with Hilary.
What passed between them will be learnt anon.

End of the First Book.

END OF VOL. I.

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